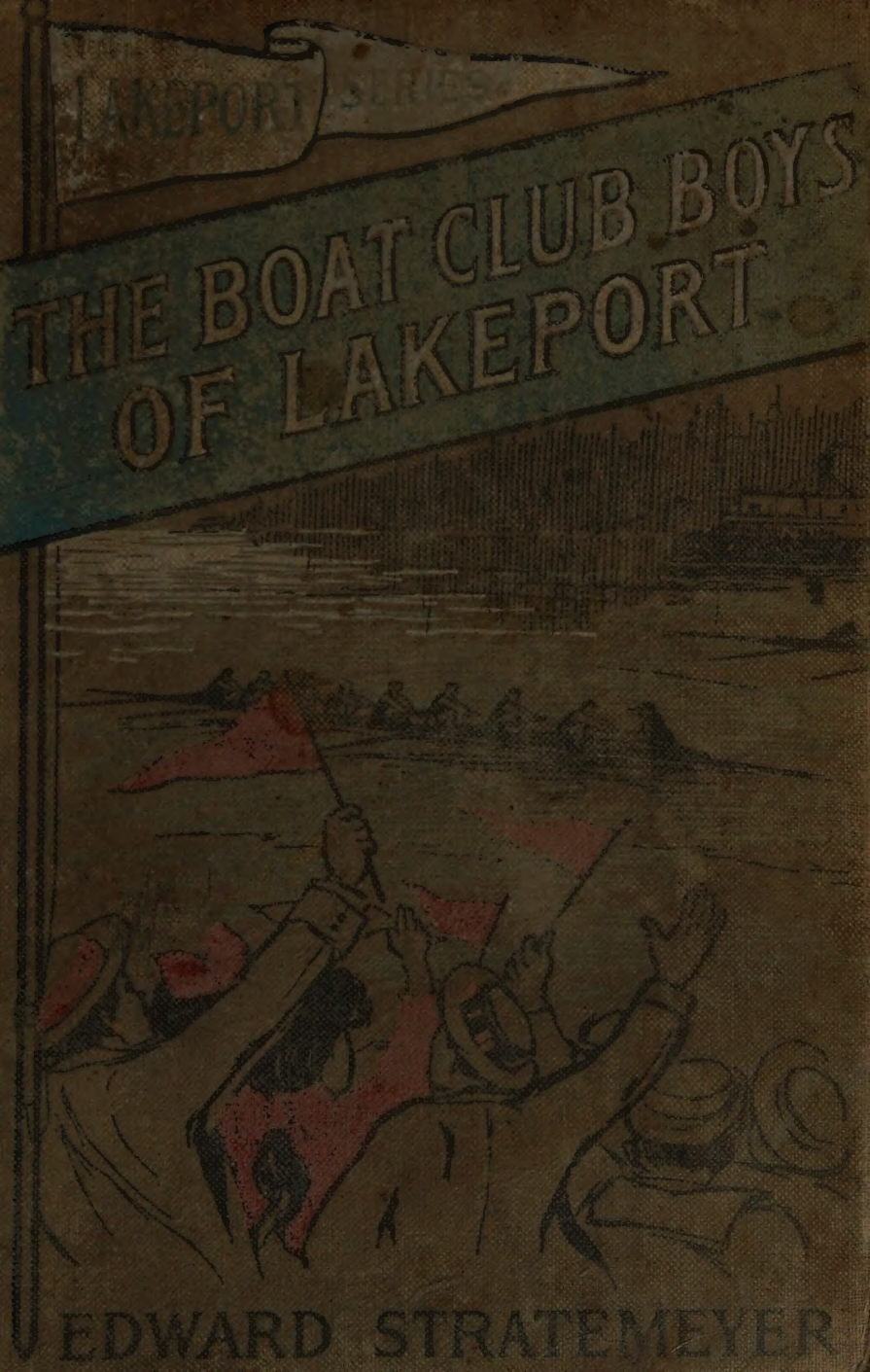
LAKEPORT SERIES

THE BOAT CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT



EDWARD STRATEMEYER

LAKEPORT SERIES

The Boat Club Boys of Lakeport

OR

The Water Champions

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport," "The Baseball Boys of Lakeport," "Dave Porter Series," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES NUTTALL

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THE BOAT CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT

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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH a complete tale in itself, this story forms the third volume in the "Lakeport Series," a line devoted to sports in the forest, on the water, and on the athletic field.

In the first volume of the series, entitled "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport; or, The Island Camp," I told how a number of lads of Lakeport organized a shooting club and went forth into the forest in quest of game. They took with them an old hunter, who taught them many things, and revealed to them numerous secrets of Nature, as surprising as they were interesting.

This outing took place during the winter. With the coming of summer the thoughts of the boys and their friends turned to baseball, and in the second volume of the series, called "The Baseball Boys of Lakeport; or, The Winning Run," were related how the baseball club was organized, how it played a number of games, and how some members of a rival nine did all in their power to bring disaster upon our young friends.

In the present volume the doings of another sum-

mer are narrated. Lakeport was located on the shore of a beautiful lake, and it was, therefore, but natural that many of the lads should know how to row and how to manage a sail-boat. Once more they get together, organize their boat club, send and receive challenges, and have contests in which the rivalry is of the keenest and, occasionally, of the bitterest.

Rowing is one of the best of outdoor sports, for it develops the lungs as well as the muscles. It should be encouraged whenever it is practicable to do so, for it will make of puny boys strong, vigorous men. But the lad who wants to row must first learn to swim; otherwise, in case of accident, there may be serious results.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

Independence Day, 1908.

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THE BOAT CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT

CHAPTER I

OUT ON THE LAKE

"WHAT do you say to a row on the lake, Harry?"

"That suits me, Fred," answered Harry Westmore. "Shall we go alone or ask some of the other fellows?"

"Oh, let us take some of the others—it will be more pleasant—and it will make rowing easier," said Fred Rush.

"Gracious, you're getting as lazy as Bart Mason!" cried Harry, with a laugh. "I guess it's because you're getting fat."

"Oh, I'm not any fatter than I always was," returned Fred, looking down at his somewhat corpulent figure. "I weigh only——"

"Where bound?" asked a voice from behind the pair, and a youth a little older than the others strode up.

"We are going out on the lake," answered Harry.

"And we want you along," added Fred.

"Just what I was going to suggest," said Joe Westmore. "I spoke of it to Link Darrow, too. He'll be along as soon as he gets through helping his father carry a chest of tools to the carpenter shop."

"That will give us a party of four, just what we want," said Harry Westmore. "We may as well get the boat out and get ready to start when Link comes." And he moved off in the direction of a dock some distance away.

"Say, do you know what I think?" came from Joe Westmore, as the three lads approached the spot where the rowboat, belonging to the Westmores, was tied up. "I think we ought to organize a regular boat club."

"That's just what Paul Shale was saying," exclaimed his brother. "He said Matt Roscoe was thinking of it, too."

"Well, I fancy we could do it," returned Fred Rush. "We organized a Gun Club and a Baseball Club—and all of us know how to row and how to sail a boat."

"Say, it would be great!" cried Harry. "We could challenge the Brookside Boat Club, and a whole lot more."

"We'd have to do a lot of practising first—just as we had to practise before we played any baseball matches," said his older brother. "Plain rowing is one thing and racing is quite another."

"Never mind, we can practise," put in Fred, with a determined shake of his head. "Don't forget that last summer we won nineteen baseball matches out of twenty-eight. If we can do as well as that on the diamond why can't we do equally well on the lake?"

"Rowing and playing ball are two different things," answered Joe. "Yet I don't doubt but that we could do well as a boat club if we put our minds on it," he added hastily. "Every one of us can pull a pretty fair stroke. All we'd have to do would be to harden our muscles, increase our lung power, and learn how to row together. Then——"

"Hi, you fellows!" came a call from the lake. "Going out?"

"Yes," answered Harry.

"Then hurry up and we'll have a race," said Paul Shale. "Matt says he wants to beat you."

"He's got to spell able first," replied Fred, making a face at the four lads in a rowboat already some distance from the dock.

"Oh, we're bound to win," said Matt Roscoe. "I'll bet you a last year's straw hat you won't be in

it after the start." And he said this so drolly that all the lads laughed.

"We can't help but win," asserted Bart Mason, the biggest youth present. He gave a yawn. "As there are only three of you I guess I won't row."

"That's Bart!" said Walter Bannister, the fourth occupant of the rowboat on the lake. "You'll have to row. We can't use three oars."

Before another word could be said a cheery whistle sounded out, and from behind a warehouse Link Darrow came into view, walking swiftly. In the meantime Fred Rush and the Westmore boys had gotten out a rowboat and stepped aboard. The newcomer ran to the edge of the dock, made a leap, and landed on the stern seat of the craft, causing it to rock violently.

"Hi, stop that!" roared Fred, in alarm. "Do you want to spill us into the lake?"

"Oh, I thought you liked to swim," answered Link Darrow, with a grin.

"So I do, but not with all my clothes on. The next time you get in be a little more careful."

"We are going to race those fellows," explained Joe, as the four boys seated themselves at the two pairs of oars the rowboat contained. "We must do our best to win."

"Bet your bottom dollar!" answered Link, slangily.

"Are you ready for the race?" called out Paul Shale.

"Yes!"

"Where are we going to race to?" demanded Harry.

"I won't race over half a mile," protested Bart Mason. "Too warm."

"Let us make the course up to Sagham's Point. The first boat to pass the boatstake up there wins the race."

"What's the prize?" piped up Matt Roscoe. "I always want to know what I am working for."

"A chunk of gingerbread and a second-hand algebra," answered Harry, with a merry laugh. "All ready?"

"Yes."

"Then go!"

The eight oars of the two rowboats were already in the water and at the word of command eight vigorous young bodies bent forward and pulled a good, telling stroke. Forward shot the rowboats, side by side, and the improvised race was on.

The scene was Pine Lake, a beautiful sheet of water, located in the heart of one of our eastern States. The day was a Saturday in June, clear and

warm, with just enough breeze blowing to make i
invigorating. All the boys had finished thei
week-end chores at home and were now out to enjo
themselves as best they could until supper time.

To those who have read the previous volumes o
this series the lads need no special introduction. A
belonged in the town of Lakeport, a thriving plac
located at the foot of Pine Lake. Mr. Westmor
the father of Joe and Harry, was a local flour an
feed merchant, with a store on the principal stree
and Fred Rush's father kept the general hardwa
store.

About a year and a half before the present ta
opens, Fred, Joe, and Harry had organized a gu
club. What this organization did has already bee
related in a volume entitled "The Gun Club Boys o
Lakeport; or, The Island Camp." In company wi
an old and trustworthy hunter named Joel Runne
they set out for Pine Island, located near the he
of the lake, and there spent several weeks in hunti
and trapping game, fishing through holes in the i
and in having a good time generally. During pa
of the outing they had with them Link Darrow a
Bart Mason, and also Teddy Dugan, the son of
Irish farmer of that district. The boys were son
what annoyed by the doings of a miserly real est
dealer named Hiram Skeetles, and by a town bu

Dan Marcy, but in the end they brought Skeetles to book in a most unexpected fashion, and for the time being Dan Marcy let them alone.

With the coming of summer the thoughts of the boys turned to baseball, and a club was organized in Mr. Darrow's carpenter shop, with Joe Westmore as captain and pitcher, Harry as first baseman, Fred Rush as catcher, and merry Matt Roscoe as short-stop. On the infield, Link Darrow covered second base, big Bart Mason third, while the outfield was cared for by Paul Shale, the swiftest runner in Lakeport, and Walter Bannister and Frank Pemberton. A rival nine was organized by a rich youth of Lakeport named Si Voup, and what this rivalry led to has been told in detail in the second volume of this series, called "The Baseball Boys of Lakeport; or, The Winning Run." Voup and a crony named Ike Boardman did all in their power to bring disaster on the heads of our friends, and in one of their mean plots were aided by Dan Marcy. But the evil-doers attempted more than they could accomplish, and in the end Voup and Boardman were glad to escape with a severe reprimand, while Dan Marcy, having been unmasked as a thief, was sent to prison.

With the end of the summer all our young friends had gone back to school, there to study diligently, for all desired to make good records for

themselves. During the mid-winter holidays seven of the lads went up to Pine Island and camped out at Two-Tree Lodge. They remained for a week, and during that time brought down two foxes, a pine marten, about twenty rabbits and several bags of wild birds.

With the coming of summer some of the lads had taken again to baseball. But then came word that George Dixon and some of the other lads of Brookside had forsaken baseball and organized a first-class boat club and the "fever" immediately spread.

"If George Dixon, Roy Willetts, and their crowd can organize a boat club and buy some racing shells, so can we," said Paul Shale to Matt Roscoe. "My Uncle Dick used to row in the races up at college and I know he would help us to get our shells and show us how to use them."

"I understand the Brookside fellows are going to build a new boathouse, too," said Matt. "They are going to place it just where the brook flows into the lake. Somebody said the building alone was going to cost twelve hundred dollars."

"They've got money—the Willetts are rich and so are the Lemmings. I don't believe we could afford such a fine building, but maybe we can raise enough money to buy one or two good shells."

"I know who would like to join a boat club," con-

tinued Matt. "He would
everything, too."

"Who?"

"Si Voup. I heard him
man about it."

"Matt Roscoe, do you me
anything to do with such a mea
bearing——"

"No, I wouldn't, Paul. I was only telling what I heard. If we should organize a boat club it is more than likely Si would organize one, too."

"Let him. But he needn't challenge me to row. I've had my fill of that crowd—at least I've had my fill of Si and Boardman. The other fellows aren't so bad."

"If we organize a boat club and they do the same thing, matters around Lakeport will be as hot as they were when we had our two baseball clubs," said Matt, and there the subject for the time being was dropped.

APTER II

RY AND A DISASTER

"HURRAH, . re gaining!" cried Harry Westmore, after about a hundred yards of the race had been covered. The rowboat in which he pulled the bow oar was about four feet ahead of the other craft.

"Pull, fellows, pull!" cried Paul Shale, who was the stroke oar in the other boat. "We mustn't let them beat us." And he "hit up" a slightly quicker stroke.

"Don't crow so early in the game, Harry," warned Joe. "Just stick to your work."

"They are catching up," came from Link. "Tell you what, Paul can row when he wants to," he added admiringly.

"Phew! but this is hot work!" groaned Bart Mason. "If I'd have known it was going to be like a bake-oven I'd have stripped before I started in. Let's call it off."

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Matt Roscoe. "Pull, you lubber, or I'll throw you overboard!" And then he bent to his oar with renewed energy and

Bart did the same, the perspiration standing out thickly on the overgrown lad's face.

But if Bart suffered, so did Fred Rush. Fred was not tall but he was very stout, and when he worked hard his face grew as rosy as a red apple. Fred, however, was a plucky lad through and through, and the idea of giving up the race never once entered his head.

"Pull! pull!" he puffed. "Hit her up good and hard, Joe. We'll stand it somehow."

"Wait till we get in sight of the boatstake," answered Joe. "Harry, can you see it yet?"

Harry gave a swift glance around. "Yes, there it is, a little further to the left," he made reply.

The course of the rowboat was slightly changed, bringing it closer than before to the other craft. Then came a nip-and-tuck race for nearly a quarter of a mile. Once Paul Shale's boat went ahead several feet, but then Bart Mason made a mis-stroke and the other craft caught up again.

"Bart, be careful," said Paul, sharply.

"Couldn't help it, a horse-fly got on my nose," grumbled Bart.

They were now close to the stake which marked the end of the course, and each crew was straining its utmost to get ahead. So intent were they upon victory that they did not notice the approach of a

craft which was new to that vicinity, a motor boat, twenty feet long, correspondingly broad of beam, and painted dark green, with the name *Skylark* in white upon either side of the bow.

"Now, then, all together!" said Joe, in a low, intense tone. "Make every stroke count." And he bent to his oar with increased energy, and those in the boat with him did the same.

"Hey, you fellows!" came suddenly from the motor boat. "Look where you're rowing, unless you want to be run down."

The cry of warning was not heard, for all of the young oarsmen were too intent upon finishing the race in the best style possible. On and on went both boats, closer and closer to the stake. Then Joe Westmore's craft forged ahead and came over the line a winner by two feet.

"Hurrah!" yelled Fred Rush. "That's the time we——"

Crash! The side of the rowboat hit the bow of the motor boat a terrific blow. There was a splintering of wood, a yell of alarm, and then the rowboat went under, carrying the Westmores, Fred, and Link with it. A moment later came another crash, not quite so hard, and the second rowboat was struck, and Bart Mason, who had leaped to his feet in alarm, went overboard. Paul Shale was hit in the chin by the

end of an oar and for the moment almost lost his senses.

"Didn't I tell you fellows to look out?" yelled a boy on the motor boat. "That's what you get for your heedlessness."

There was no immediate answer to this, and for a good reason. Five of the young oarsmen were struggling in the water to save themselves, and the other three were too dazed to speak. Luckily the five in the water could swim, and coming to the surface they struck out for the rowboat, which still remained afloat. In the meantime the motor boat swung around in a semicircle, the two lads on board doing nothing to aid those who were in need of assistance.

"Catch hold, Fred," cried Matt, as the stout youth came up. He reached out his hand and presently Fred Rush managed to crawl over the stern of the damaged rowboat. Then Link was pulled in and Bart Mason. Joe and Harry were some distance off, and it was seen that Harry was doing his best to hold his big brother up.

"This way, Harry!"

"I—I can't come! Joe is knocked out. Row over here," was the gasped-out reply.

Much alarmed, the others took up the oars and did as directed. Poor Harry could hardly hold out,

and after handing up his brother had to be literally dragged to safety. It was found Joe was suffering from a cut over one eye from which the blood was flowing freely. As quickly as possible the hurt was bound up with handkerchiefs.

"Hi, you come back here!" roared Paul, suddenly. And then he motioned to those on the motor boat to return, for the craft had started to move away.

"What do you want?" was the surly question. "It wasn't our fault you got struck."

"If it isn't Si Voup!" ejaculated Fred.

"Yes, and the other fellow is Ike Boardman," returned Link. "I heard that Mr. Boardman was thinking of buying a motor boat. That must be it."

"I believe they ran us down on purpose," put in Harry. "They'd be just mean enough to do it."

"Si Voup, what do you mean by running us down?" demanded Link.

"We didn't run you down," answered the rich youth, hotly.

"You ran into us, we didn't run into you," cried Ike Boardman.

"You saw we were racing, didn't you?" questioned Fred.

"That wasn't any of our affair," answered Voup.

"We are not interested in your doings," he added, loftily.

"We've got as much right to be on this lake as you have," said Boardman.

"That may be true, but you have no right to run into us and smash our boat," went on Fred.

"And dump us all overboard and nearly kill my brother," added Harry. "Don't you know we can have you locked up for that?"

"It's your fault, not ours."

"You saw we were racing and coming this way. Why didn't you give us a clear course?"

"You don't own the lake."

"And neither have you any right to get in our way."

"I guess we've a right to cross the lake."

"So you have, but please remember one thing," broke in Bart Mason. "We were going up the lake while you were going across, consequently we had the right of way. And another thing, a power boat or a sail-boat is always supposed to give a rowboat a wide berth. You could easily have kept out of our way."

"Humph!" muttered Si Voup. For the moment he knew not what to say.

"I think you'll have to pay for the smashed row-boat," said Harry. "And maybe you'll have to pay

Joe's doctor bill, too," he went on, glancing at his brother, who had somewhat recovered.

"If Si Voup doesn't pay for the boat I know what I'll do," said Joe, in a weak but steady voice.

"What will you do?" demanded the rich youth.

"As soon as I get well, Voup, I'll take it out of you, and out of Boardman, too. I haven't forgotten how you've acted in the past and I don't intend to let you off this time. It's pay up or take the consequences."

"See here," began Boardman in alarm, "I want you to know——"

"I know all I want to know, Boardman. You'll pay up or take the consequences, both of you. That's all I've got to say."

"Oh, your old tub of a rowboat didn't amount to much anyway," grumbled Boardman. Joe's calm way of speaking made him decidedly uneasy.

"Harry and I paid Slosson fifteen dollars for that boat, and the extra pair of oars cost two dollars."

"The oars are all right and the boat can be patched up."

"Oh shut up, Ike," growled Si Voup. "I'm not going to do anything for them. Come on." And he started to crank up the flywheel of the motor boat.

"I'll give you three days to settle in!" called out Joe.

"And if you don't do it we'll take the law in our own hands," added Harry.

"Go to grass!" muttered Si Voup, and having gotten the motor to running he and Boardman steered the *Skylark* up the lake and out of hearing distance.

"What do you think they'll do?" asked Ike Boardman, after several minutes of silence had passed.

"I don't know and I don't care," growled Si Voup. He lit a cigarette and began to puff away savagely.

"Do you think they'll take the law in their own hands?"

"If Joe Westmore does that I guess I can fight as well as he can."

"But we can't fight the whole crowd, Si."

"Oh, Westmore was only blowing."

"If my father finds out I've had more trouble with that crowd he won't like it at all. He gave me a terrible talking to last summer."

At these words Si Voup shrugged his shoulders. After his trouble with the Westmores and Fred Rush he had run away to an uncle who lived in Boston. The uncle had given him a stern lecture

and sent him home, and then his father had cut off his spending money for several months.

"They can't prove we smashed the boat," he said. "Let us stick to it that it was entirely their fault."

"Maybe we had better say they ran into us and did it on purpose," suggested Ike, cunningly.

"Sure! Just the thing! We can say that they are jealous because you have the motor boat and they wanted to sink us."

"That's the talk. And I've got another plan, too. Let's scratch some of the paint on the boat and break one or two things and say they did that, too. We can make out that they organized a regular attack on us."

"We'll do it. We needn't break anything that is really valuable, you know, only enough to make things look as if we'd had a terrible mix-up with them."

Speeding out of sight of those on the rowboat, the two young rascals set to work to carry out their nefarious plot to get our young friends into trouble. Some of the paint was scratched off the sides and rail of the motor boat, the glass to the bow-light was broken, a cushion was ripped apart, and going ashore, several rocks were thrown into the bottom of the craft, along with two fair-sized clubs.

"There, that looks as if we had had a pitched battle," declared Si Voup. "Now I guess when we get back we'll have a story to tell that will get Joe Westmore and his crowd into pretty hot water!"

CHAPTER III

AN ACCUSATION AND WHAT FOLLOWED

"Boys, what shall we do with the smashed rowboat?" asked Link, after he and the others had watched the motor boat disappear around a bend of the lake shore.

"We might tow it back," suggested Paul.

The rowboat had not sunk, but was drifting close by, one side and the stern badly shattered. Two of the oars had been found, one with the blade split. What had become of the other oars they could not ascertain.

"We'll tie the rowboat to that stake," said Joe. "That will keep it from drifting away. Then I'll notify Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman where the boat is and let them know what has happened—that is, provided Si and Ike don't make good in the three days I mentioned."

"That's the talk," said Harry. "They have got to pay for that boat, and that is all there is to it."

The smashed craft was tied up and then the other boat was headed for Lakeport. With eight on

board it was a hard task to row the boat and they took turns at the oars, that is, seven of them did, Joe, on account of his wound, taking it easy on the stern seat. Fortunately the sun shone brightly, so they did not suffer on account of the wetting received. As they moved along they discussed the accident from every possible viewpoint and all reached the conclusion that Si Voup and Ike Boardman had been wholly to blame for the accident.

"This takes all the fun out of this afternoon," was Matt's comment. "And I thought we were going to have a barrel of it."

"After the race I was going to propose something," answered Joe. "Maybe you can all guess it."

"About the boat club?" queried Fred.

"Yes."

"That's the talk!" cried Paul. "We must organize a regular boat club by all means."

"Either that or go back to baseball," added Bart Mason. "I've got to do something this summer. A fellow can't sleep all the time." And he said this so seriously that the others laughed.

About half the distance to Lakeport had been covered when the boys made the dismaying discovery that the rowboat was leaking. At first the water

came in slowly, but then a seam opened from end to end and they were in danger of being sunk.

"Run her ashore—it's our only chance!" cried Harry. "Make for Hollis's meadow."

As rapidly as possible the craft was turned about and they headed for the shore. While four rowed with vigor, two began to bail the boat as best they could with their caps.

"I don't think we can make it," said Fred, but just then they hit a mud flat and a moment later ran up close to the grassy bank of the meadow. Bart Mason took a flying leap ashore, to slip and land flat on his stomach in several inches of muddy water.

"Tumbling tadpoles!" he gasped, as he got up. "Look out, you fellows, or there will be trouble."

"Bart's trying to coast in the grass," cried Matt. "Better get a toboggan."

With care they went ashore, pulled up the boat and tied it fast to some bushes. Then they gathered in a knot to discuss the situation.

"If we can't use the boat we'll have to walk home," said Fred. "We are certainly having all kinds of bad luck to-day."

"Cheer up, the worst is yet to come," said Matt, with a grin.

The meadow where they had landed belonged to a

farmer named Hollis, and they found this individual working in a field close by.

"Our boat sprung a leak and we had to land here," said Paul.

"Should think it would spring a leak with such a crowd on board," answered Amos Hollis. "Trying to carry all the boys of Lakeport?"

"Hardly. Can we leave the boat down there at present?"

"Why, yes, if you want to."

"All right. We'll be back for it some day next week."

"Very well." The farmer looked at Joe, whom he knew very well. "What is the matter with your head?" he questioned.

"Oh, we had another accident and I got struck."

"Humph! You boys want to be careful or somebody'll get killed," was the farmer's comment, and then he turned again to his task.

Mr. Hollis had been hard at work cutting down a large and partly decayed apple tree. The tree was almost ready to fall and the boys lingered around until, with a mighty crash, the tree came down.

"That's a sight worth seeing!" cried Harry. "My! what a noise it did make when it fell!"

They hung around, watching the chopping away of several big limbs, and then set out for Lakeport.

As a consequence they did not reach home until almost supper time. Joe slipped in unobserved and attended to his bruised head and fixed it up with court-plaster, and he and his brother changed their clothes.

"Harry, I want you to run down to the store and get some cornmeal," said Mrs. Westmore. "And get a small bag of salt, too."

"All right," answered Harry, cheerfully.

He was soon on his way to his father's establishment. On the street he fell in with Link.

"I've got to go down to your father's store, too," said Link. "Mother wants some canary seed and she doesn't like the kind Deckel keeps."

"Father has some new seed and it is very good, Link. Laura gives it to her canary and he is doing well on it."

When the two lads reached the flour and feed establishment they found Mr. Westmore at his desk in earnest conversation with a well-dressed gentleman.

"Hullo, there is Mr. Boardman," whispered Harry. "I wonder what brought him? He never came here before, so far as I know. He trades with Deckel."

"Well, I mean just what I say!" the two boys heard Alexander Boardman exclaim. "I never heard of such an outrage."

"Mr. Boardman," Mr. Westmore answered, "what you say may be true, but I can scarcely believe it."

"Then come and look at the motor boat, sir, come and look at it! Just about half ruined—and the boat cost me eight hundred dollars!"

"But what started the quarrel?"

"What started it? Nothing, sir; absolutely nothing. Your boys and their friends are jealous because my son has a motor boat, that is all."

"Yes, but—here is Harry now. I will ask him about it."

"Ha! So here is one of the young scoundrels, eh?" roared Alexander Boardman. "Young man, do you know that you have done something which is liable to land you in jail; yes, sir, in jail?"

"I? In jail?" stammered Harry. He was so bewildered he did not know what to say.

"Yes, sir, in jail."

"Harry, is it true that you and Joe and a number of others attacked Mr. Boardman's son and the motor boat?" demanded Mr. Westmore sternly.

"No, sir, it is not true!" answered the boy, promptly. "The motor boat ran into us."

"Ha! I know better!" cried Mr. Boardman. "I have the truth from my son and from his friend,

Silas Voup. You and your cronies acted like a lot of hoodlums, and——"

"Mr. Boardman, allow me to question my son," interrupted Mr. Westmore. "Harry is no hoodlum nor does he associate with hoodlums," he added warmly.

"Oh, of course you'll take his part," sneered the rich man.

"Are you not taking the part of your son? If my son has done wrong I will punish him, and if he is responsible for the wrecking of your boat I'll pay the damages. But I want to get at the bottom of this matter first."

"We didn't wreck any boat," said Harry. "The motor boat wrecked our rowboat, and Joe, Link, Fred, and myself had to swim to the other rowboat to save our lives."

"The motor boat was practically ruined, and you did it," stormed Alexander Boardman. "More than that, you and your crowd of young rascals attacked my son and Silas Voup with sticks and stones, and Isaac is now so lame he can scarcely walk."

"Well, I never!" cried Link. "Mr. Westmore, believe me, there isn't a word of truth in that story."

"Ha! Do you mean to say I have not told the

truth?" demanded Mr. Boardman, drawing himself up as if to crush the carpenter's son by a look.

"I do," answered Link, firmly. "Your son and Si Voup were entirely to blame for what happened."

"Is that true, Harry?" questioned Mr. Westmore.

"I think it is, father. I am willing to tell the whole story and then you can judge for yourself as to who is to blame."

"I am not going to listen to that boy!" stormed Alexander Boardman. "I am going to have satisfaction or I am going to law."

"I shall do what is fair, Mr. Boardman—I can promise no more," replied the flour and feed dealer. "Remember one thing," he added, pointedly, "your son's reputation is none of the best."

These last words caused Alexander Boardman to grow red in the face, for he well remembered the past trouble to which Mr. Westmore referred. But he was too stiff-necked and unreasonable to back down from the position he had taken.

"We'll see about this!" he stormed. "I'll call again on Monday and then if I cannot get a settlement out of those who attacked my son and the motor boat I'll call in the aid of the law!" And

having thus majestically delivered himself he strode from the store.

"Well, of all the unreasonable fellows I ever saw——" began Link, under his breath. "Mr. Westmore, don't you believe a word he says," he went on aloud.

"I want the whole story," answered the merchant. "Harry, give me the plain truth of this affair."

"I will, father," replied the son, and then told how the boat race had started, and of what happened up to the time Si Voup and Ike Boardman moved away in the motor boat and allowed the others to shift for themselves.

"Now, Link, what have you to say?" demanded Mr. Westmore.

"Harry has told you all the facts save one," answered the carpenter's son. "When the boat was struck Joe was hit in the forehead and badly wounded. He might have been drowned if Harry hadn't caught him and held him up until we could aid both of them."

"What did Si Voup and Ike Boardman do after the rowboat was smashed?"

"They moved the motor boat away a short distance and looked on."

"Didn't they offer to assist you at all?"

"No, sir."

"Not even when they saw somebody might be drowned?"

"They didn't stir a hand to help us," put in Harry.

"Tell me what they said."

Harry and Link did so, and then told how the smashed boat had been tied up and how they had landed at the Hollis place and come home.

"You can ask all the others if you wish, father," added Harry. "I know they will tell you exactly what I have told you."

"I will see some of the others to-morrow after church," said Mr. Westmore. "If what you have said is strictly true I do not think we have much to fear from Mr. Boardman, although he is rich and will most likely make all the trouble he can for us," he added, with a sigh.

CHAPTER IV

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

While Mr. Boardman was calling on Mr. Westmore, Si Voup's father called on Mr. Rush. Si and Ike had concocted their story with considerable skill, and part of the tale was to the effect that the two Westmore boys had attacked Ike with sticks and stones while Fred and Link had attacked Si in the same manner. The boys in the other rowboat had also flung stones at the motor boat and, later, had aided in the spoiling of the new craft. To escape, Si and Ike had started the motor boat at full speed and this had sunk one rowboat. They had had to run away for fear of being hit by the rocks and killed.

Si Voup's father was a small, nervous man, easily angered, and as unreasonable as was Alexander Boardman. He was very rich and had an idea that everybody in Lakeport ought to honor him and bow before him.

He was so worked up that it was several minutes before Mr. Rush could understand what he was say-

ing. According to Mr. Voup the battle had been a terrific one and it was the wonder of wonders that both Si and Ike had not been slaughtered.

"Your son and his whole crowd ought to be in jail," snarled Mr. Voup. "It is a shame to allow such imps at large."

"See here, Mr. Voup, if you are going to talk that way I'll order you out of my store," answered Mr. Rush, warmly. "If any boy in Lakeport is an imp it's your son, and you ought to know it by this time."

"What! This to me!"

"Yes. I haven't forgotten what he did to Fred, abducting him and leaving him tied up on Pine Island. If your son was hurt he probably got what he deserved."

"So you are going to take your son's part?"

"I am, until I find out I am wrong."

"You won't take my word?"

"No, not until I've talked to Fred."

"I'll have the law on you, and so will Mr. Boardman!"

"Then I'll have the law on you for what your son and Ike Boardman did to Fred last summer."

"Bah! You can't frighten me!" cried Mr. Voup, pounding the counter with his fist. "I am going to have satisfaction and don't you forget it." And

more excited then ever he bounced out of the store.

Mr. Rush was worried, and he at once sent for Fred and had his son tell his story. Then Bart Mason chanced to come along, followed by Matt Roscoe, and they corroborated what Fred had said.

"Fred, go over to Mr. Westmore's and tell him I will see him as soon as I close up," said Mr. Rush. "This is evidently a plot to get you and your friends into trouble."

Late that night a conference was held between Mr. Rush, Mr. Westmore, and the parents of several other of the boys. Another conference occurred on Sunday afternoon, and a decision was reached to stand firm against the Voups and Boardmans. Mr. Westmore was very indignant over what had happened to Joe and was inclined to go to law at once, but it was decided all around to wait.

A report was circulated that Ike Boardman was laid up at home with a lame back and when Si Voup made his appearance he limped painfully, saying he had been struck in the ankle by a stone flung by one of the boys. Of course Ike was not sick at all nor was Si hurt in the least, yet both managed to get much sympathy from their relatives and close friends.

Si's lameness, so called, was productive of con-

siderable fun at his expense by Matt Roscoe, who was always up to some trick or another. Matt knew that Si did not like dogs, and watching his opportunity he followed Si to the post-office, where there was quite a crowd collected waiting for the afternoon mail to be sorted.

"Hi, look at the mad dog!" called out Matt, almost in Si's ear. "Look out, Si! He's after you!"

At the cry Si gave a leap into the air and then started to run.

"Keep him off! Keep him off!" he screamed, and without waiting to look behind him he sprinted down the street and into a store a hundred feet away.

As soon as the crowd realized the joke Matt had played, it set up a shout of laughter and all sorts of comments were made about Si.

"He's not so lame but that he can run if he wants to," remarked one of the men present.

"Guess his lameness is put on," added another.

"Si ought to join the Mad Dog Association," said Matt. "Sure cure for all sorts of lameness;" and this made the crowd laugh again.

When Si realized how he had been hoaxed he was enraged and vowed he'd get square with Matt.

"Of course I ran, thinking a mad dog was after me," he explained. "But it hurt my ankle dread-

fully. I'll have to ride home." And he hired the livery stable keeper to take him to the Voup mansion.

It was not until Tuesday that both sides in the controversy met, at the office of a lawyer named Skaler. It was after school hours and all the boys were present and likewise seven of the boys' fathers.

It was a stormy meeting, but after it was over Joe and his friends felt that they had won at least a partial victory. A threat made by Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman to have our young friends arrested was met by a counter threat to have Si and Ike taken up for the doings of the previous summer. As a result, Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman backed down a little, but they insisted upon it that the Westmores and the others pay for the damage done to the motor boat.

"And we insist upon it that you pay for the damage done to our rowboat," said Mr. Westmore.

"And to the rowboat my son owns," added Mr. Shale.

This part of the difficulty could not be settled, and in the end Mr. Boardman and Mr. Voup withdrew, saying they would bring a suit at law for the damage done to the motor boat, they placing the amount at one hundred and seventy-five dollars, although to

make the boat as good as new cost Mr. Boardman, later on, less than thirty dollars.

"Well, father, what are we to do now?" asked Joe, after the meeting had broken up and they were on the way to Mr. Westmore's store.

"You go and get your smashed boat and have Jackson repair it and send the bill to me," said Mr. Westmore. "I'll make Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman settle later."

Joe, Fred, and Harry went after the boat the next day, and Paul Shale and Matt Roscoe went after the craft left at Hollis's meadow. It was quite a task to get the disabled boats to Lakeport, but once there they were turned over to John Jackson, a local boat builder and repairer, who said he would make them both practically as good as new for twenty-two dollars.

"Mr. Boardman wanted me to repair his motor boat, but I said I didn't want the job," said Jackson. "I don't like that class of folks to work for."

"Was it damaged much?" asked Fred.

"No, it was mussed up more than anything."

"Do you know what we have an idea of doing?" said Harry. "We're thinking of organizing a regular boat club."

"That's the talk!" said John Jackson, enthusiastically. "We haven't had a regular boat club

here for six years. It would be just the thing. Would you make it a rowing club or a sailing club?"

"Oh, we had a rowing club in our minds," answered Joe.

"But we might make it a sailing club, too," cried Paul. "I know my uncle would lend us the *Sprite*. She's a pretty nice sloop since he had her overhauled and painted."

"Why, yes, boys, maké it a rowing and a sailing club while you are at it," said the boat builder. "Maybe I might let you have the *Mary Ellen* now and then." He referred to a small yacht which he kept for pleasure parties. He wanted to see a boat club organized, knowing that it would tend to stir up matters aquatic, which would be good for his business.

"Mr. Jackson, how much would some good racing shell cost?" asked Paul.

"Oh, a thousand dollars or so," was the answer, and the boat builder's eyes twinkled. "That is, if you want the kind the college boys use," he added.

"Whoop, I'm dead!" cried Matt, tragically. "Ma deah sah, do you take us fo' billionaires?" he added, in negro dialect. "If yo' do, sah, allow me to state fo' de benefit ob de community at large, sah, dat dis am gwine ter be an ebery-day, ordinahry club, sah, widout frills or silber linin', sah!"

"We certainly can get shells for less than a thousand dollars," said Joe.

"Oh, yes, Joe, a good deal less. What would you like to have?"

"I don't know yet. We've got to organize our club first and make up our minds as to just what we want to do."

"I got a letter from my brother at East Haven last week. He told me a boat club up there was going to disband and would sell their outfit cheap. That might be your chance."

"How much did they want?"

"I don't know, but I could find out."

"I wish you would, and find out, too, just what they've got and what condition the boats are in."

"I will," said the boat builder.

"Even if the boats are a little out of condition we might buy them and get you to fix them up," said Paul. "It would probably be much cheaper than buying new boats."

"Yes, good racing shells when new cost a heap of money, Paul."

"Do you know what kind of shells the Brookside fellows have?" asked Fred.

"I have heard that they are very fine. They were made by some firm on the Hudson River who make a specialty of that sort of work."

"What about the boat club at Hoxbury?"

"Their boats are old, but I heard they are going to get some new ones now that the Brooksiders are in the swim to challenge them," answered John Jackson; and then turned to the work he had dropped to wait on them.

"I hope we can organize our club and get it in good running order," said Joe, as he and his chums walked homeward. "We could challenge the Hoxbury Club and the Brookside Club, and others, and have lots of fun."

"Oh, we must organize by all means!" cried Paul.

"But it will take a lot of money," said Fred.

"Never mind, we'll raise the money somehow," said Joe. "Don't you know how folks helped us out when we organized our baseball club?"

"And we'll have to find some kind of a boathouse in which to keep our shells."

"Well, we'll find that, too," said Matt. "Oh, the club is a sure thing and don't you make any mistake about it," he added, confidently.

CHAPTER V

HOW THE BOAT CLUB WAS ORGANIZED

SEVERAL days went by and although the Westmores and their friends expected some kind of a legal move on the part of the Voups and Boardmans, nothing developed.

"I guess they have made up their minds to let it drop," said Fred Rush. But in this surmise the stout youth was mistaken.

On the following Friday Joe issued a call to all of the boys who had formerly belonged to the Lakeport Baseball Club, and to several others, to meet at Mr. Darrow's carpenter shop on Saturday afternoon at two o'clock, to discuss the advisability of organizing a boat club. Then he, Harry, and Link set to work to put the upper part of the carpenter shop in order for the occasion. During the winter the baseball club had not met and the club-room, consequently, had been neglected. The floor was now well swept, the long workbench cleared off, and suitable boxes and nail kegs were set around for seats.

The boys began to arrive long before the hour appointed and by two o'clock fourteen lads were present, among them Teddy Dugan, who brought with him the broad smile all the others loved to see.

"Sure and this is foine," observed the Irish lad, as he gazed around. "It's somebody has been playin' the janitor, so he has."

"Don't worry, Teddy, we're going to elect you janitor after this," said Fred.

"And we'll give you a big tin badge with a broom on it," added Matt.

"He can sweep the floor while we sweep the lake," suggested Bart.

"Sure and it's meself could make th' dust fly on th' lake, too," retorted Teddy. "But I shan't moind bein' janitor at all," he added hastily.

"This crowd will please come to order!" called out Joe, and rapped on the workbench with a wooden mallet taken from a near-by tool chest.

"Let's order some ice-cream," suggested the irrepressible Matt, in a low tone.

"Matt Roscoe can order ice-cream for all of us after the session is over," came from Walter Bannister. "I'll take chocolate, Matt."

"Put me down for strawberry, Matt," added Link.

Bang! Bang! Down came Joe's gavel loudly and

the talking at once ceased. Then there was a moment of silence. Harry stepped forward with a paper in his hand.

"Friends and fellow-members of the Lakeport Baseball Club," he began. "We have met here this afternoon for the purpose of deciding whether or not we shall organize a boat club or pay all our attention to the ball club——"

"We want the boat club!" cried several.

"As you all know, the boys of Brookside have organized a fine boat club, and there is also a good club at Hoxbury. Lakeport has not had a club for six years. The baseball club was organized last year and won some great victories. I am sure, and so are my brother and a number of others, that if we organized a boat club——"

"We'd beat anything on Pine Lake," finished Bart Mason. "Sure thing; eh, fellows?"

"Yes!" "Yes!" was the answer from nearly all of the others present.

"Let's organize at once!" declared Frank Pemberton. "I nominate Harry Westmore temporary chairman of this meeting."

"Second the nomination!" cried Matt. "All in favor say aye."

"Aye!" came from the crowd.

"Put and carried. Harry, take the tiller and

hoist the mainsail. Sheer off three points on the starboard watch and send her scudding." And at this burlesque nautical remark a roar of laughter went up.

"I move we fine Matt two pieces of chewing gum for talking," said Bart.

"Chewed or unchewed?" questioned Matt promptly.

"Now then," called out Harry, when the fun had come to an end, "shall we get down to making our constitution and set of by-laws or appoint a committee for that purpose?"

"Sure an' ain't we all got good constitutions?" asked Teddy Dugan, innocently.

"Let's elect our officers and select a committee for the constitution and by-laws," suggested Link. "We know what we want. What's the use of a lot of red tape? I nominate Joe Westmore for president and captain of the club. We all know what he did for the gun club and the baseball club, and he'll be sure to lead us to victory on the water."

"I nominate Paul Shale," came promptly from Joe. "Paul knows as much about rowing and sailing as any of us and he has often taken us out in his uncle's sloop."

"I am going to vote for Joe," said Paul. "He

knows more about running any kind of a club than anybody else. I second his nomination."

"Any more nominations?" asked Harry.

There was a moment of silence.

"Let's make Joe's election unanimous," suggested Bart. "He's the fellow for the position. All in favor say yes—excuse me for calling for the vote, Harry. I know you are too modest to do it for your brother," added the big youth.

"Yes!" came back the cry.

"Joe is unanimously elected!" cried Fred. "Joe, kindly take the chair," and he pointed gravely to a kitchen chair which stood in a corner, minus two legs.

Joe blushed deeply. "It's very good of you fellows to elect me," he said. "I still think Paul should have been chosen. However, I am not going to back out. Will somebody nominate him for general racing manager or something like that? It's what Paul ought to be."

There was some discussion on this point and it was resolved that, when the by-laws were drawn up, they should provide for a general manager of all racing events and that Paul should be the one to fill the position.

After that Bart Mason was chosen treasurer of the club, he having formerly acted as secretary of

the baseball club. Then Link was made secretary. It was decided to ask several men, including Mr. Westmore, Mr. Rush and Mr. Shale, to act as a board of directors for the boys, should such a board be needed. Every youth present was called upon to pay an initiation fee of two dollars. In addition to this each member was requested to go among his friends and see how much money could be raised for the purpose of buying boats and other things needed, and for either renting a boathouse or building one.

"Well, fellows, since you have made me the head of this club, I feel that I must do for it all I possibly can," said Joe. "I've got nine dollars saved up, that I was going to spend for several things. I am going to put eight dollars of it into the contribution fund, to start the ball a-rolling."

"And I'll put in three dollars," added Harry, quickly.

"Put me down for four dollars and a half," said Fred.

"I've only got seventy-five cents saved, but that goes in, too," added Frank Pemberton.

"I'll give a dollar," said another.

"I am going to sell my dog to Tim Brown for two dollars," said Link. "I'll give the money to the club."

"I've got my bicycle," said Matt. "I was going to let Murdock the second-hand man have it for three dollars. Why can't I raffle it off for the benefit of the club at twenty-five cents a chance?"

"Just the thing!" cried Bart. "We can help you to sell tickets."

"And I'll print the tickets on my printing press for nothing," put in Walter Bannister, who had an amateur printing outfit with which he did quite creditable work.

The boys became thoroughly enthusiastic, and by the time the meeting broke up the treasurer had twenty-eight dollars and a half in his possession and over thirty dollars more had been promised. In addition to printing the tickets for the raffle, Walter Bannister promised to print some neat sheets stating the object of the Lakeport Boat Club and what it hoped to accomplish for the honor of the town, and leaving at the bottom a blank space on each sheet where people might put down the amount of their subscriptions.

"Every member can take one or more of the sheets," said Joe. "Get all the subscriptions you can and get them as large as you can, the larger the better."

The boys were even more enthusiastic than they

had been over the baseball club, and they talked matters over until it was time to separate for supper. Then Joe and Harry went home whistling cheerily.

"Mother, we've formed our boat club!" cried Harry, rushing into the living room. "And Joe is president and captain."

"And what are you, Harry?" asked the mother with a smile.

"Oh, I'm going to be one of the oarsmen when we get down to business. I am going to row to win, too," he added earnestly. "We are going to do our best to defeat the Brookside Club and the club at Hoxbury."

"Are you going to have a boathouse?" questioned Laura Westmore. "The club at Lake Bassby has one, and Sadie West wrote me that when they have regattas, as they call them, they have music at the club house and refreshments and sometimes dancing."

"We are going to have a boathouse if we can raise money enough."

"We girls might help to raise the money if you'd make us honorary members, or something like that," pursued Laura, who had once been elected an honorary member of the Gun Club for having supplied the members with doughnuts.

"I'll help you, Harry," said Bessie Westmore. "Only you must promise to take me out on the lake some time in one of your new boats."

"I couldn't take you out in a racing shell, Bessie," answered the brother. "They are only meant for the oarsmen. But I might take you out in a sail-boat—if we get one."

"We girls might make you some flags," said Laura, who was handy with a needle. "You'll want them, of course."

"To be sure!" cried Joe. "Oh, you can help us in lots of things, sis!" he cried impulsively, and gave Laura a brotherly hug and then caught up Bessie and lifted her several feet in the air. "I can tell you, the Lakeport Boat Club is going to be the best thing this town has seen!"

"Who has joined?" asked Mrs. Westmore. "I trust you didn't take in the Voup boy or that Ike Boardman."

"No, they weren't asked to come and were conspicuous by their absence," answered Joe, sarcastically.

"Maybe they'll organize a rival club, just as they organized a rival baseball club," observed Laura.

"If they do they'll get left—so far as we are concerned," said Harry. "We won't either

challenge them or accept any challenge from them."

"Perhaps they'll say you're afraid to meet them."

"Then let them say it. I guess our friends will know how matters stand," answered Joe.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE RUNNELL HOMESTEAD

On the following Tuesday Paul Shale had to go across the lake on an errand for his uncle. He went after school and took Fred and Harry with him. The boys crossed in the *Sprite,* Paul's uncle loaning them the sloop for that purpose.

They went over to a small settlement called Crabb's Landing and there tied the sloop to a tree. Then they set off for a lumber camp half a mile distant.

"I understand Ike Boardman has got his motor boat out again," said Harry. "Teddy Dugan saw him in it yesterday."

"I thought I saw the motor boat on this side when we were crossing," returned Paul.

The road to the lumber camp ran along the shore for a short distance and then cut through a dense patch of timber known as Barton's Woods. Here there was another road, leading to the hill upon which was located the home of Joel Runnell, the old hunter who had accompanied the boys on many hunting trips.

"By the way, I haven't seen Runnell for some time," said Harry, when they came to the second road. "Wonder where he is keeping himself?"

"Oh, he must be around somewhere," answered Paul. "You must remember he doesn't care for town life but prefers to keep in the woods and on the hills."

"I saw his daughter Cora in town last week," said Fred. "She came to father's store for some powder and shot. She looked a good deal worried over something."

"If we had time I'd like to call at their home," said Harry. "It wouldn't take very long to run over."

The other lads were willing, for each knew the old hunter and his daughter very well. Paul's errand at the lumber camp was quickly finished, and then the boys took to a hill trail which one of the lumberman said would bring them to the spring directly behind the Runnell homestead.

"Well, I declare!" cried Harry, as they came in sight of the old hunter's place. "There is Ike Boardman talking to Cora Runnell."

"Yes, and there is Si Voup, too," added Paul. "What can have brought them to this place?"

"Maybe they came on business."

"I know your father is around somewhere and I

want to see him," our young friends heard Ike Boardman say. "It won't do him any good to hide."

"He is not hiding, I tell you," answered Cora Runnell. "He had to go to Brookside several days ago on business and he has not yet returned."

"Keeping in hiding, eh?" sneered Si Voup. "Well, I guess it won't do him any good," he continued, maliciously. He had once tried to be friendly with Cora, but she had treated him coolly, and now he was glad to say something which might worry her.

"He had just better come out and show himself," went on Ike Boardman. He drew himself up. "I've got business with him, I have." His manner was exactly that of his parent when the latter was in his most arrogant mood.

"This is interesting," whispered Harry. "I wonder what's the trouble?"

"Something is wrong, sure," answered Fred. "Shall we show ourselves?"

"Are you going to call your father or not?" demanded Ike Boardman, and as he spoke he caught Cora by the arm roughly.

This action was more than Harry could bear, and without hesitation he ran forward and his two chums followed.

"Ike Boardman, you leave Cora Runnell alone!"

"Oh, Harry!" cried the girl, in astonishment. And then the look on her face showed that she was greatly pleased to see the newcomers.

Ike Boardman was astonished and he lost no time in letting go his hold and backing several paces. Harry strode up to him.

"What do you mean by treating Cora in this fashion?" he demanded.

"This ain't any of your affair," grumbled Ike.

"Maybe I'll make it my affair, Ike Boardman. Cora, what does he want, if I may ask?"

"He wants to see my father, and father is away. I told him that, but neither he nor Si Voup will believe me."

"What's the reason you can't take her word?" asked Fred. He thought a good deal of the old hunter's daughter.

"This isn't your affair!" cried Ike, angrily. "My father sent me here on a—er—important business, and I must see Joel Runnell."

"You can't see him if he isn't here," spoke up Paul.

"I believe he is in hiding."

"Sure he is," broke in Si Voup. "He's afraid to show himself."

"You leave Cora Runnell alone!" — *Page 52.*

"That's nonsense, I tell you," said Harry. "If Joel Runnell was here he'd show himself in a minute."

There was an awkward pause all around.

"If you have any message for my father you can leave it," said Cora. And then, as Ike Boardman turned to consult with Si Voup, she whispered to Fred: "Please don't leave me until after they go away."

"I'll stay, Cora," answered the stout youth. "They shan't trouble you any more, either."

"I came to collect fifty dollars," said Ike Boardman. "It's due on a note my father holds against old Runnell."

"Did he give your father the note?" asked Paul, in astonishment.

"No, he gave it to Dr. Dilworth for payment of his bill, and the doctor turned it over to my father, and my father wants his money. Runnell knows the note is due and that is why he won't show himself."

"My father went to Brookside to get some money that was due him," said Cora. "Probably he'll pay the note when he gets back."

"If he doesn't pay my father will have the law on him."

"See here, Ike, you needn't try to frighten

Cora," said Harry, severely. "If the note is due I am sure Joel Runnell will pay it."

"My father wants his money right away."

"As Joel Runnell isn't at home you had better be going," added Paul, significantly.

"We'll go when we please."

"We didn't come here to be bossed by you," said Si Voup.

"Well, you are not going to annoy Cora further," cried Harry. "If you do we'll make you answer for it."

"Huh! Don't you get smart, Harry Westmore. Remember, we haven't settled that motor boat affair yet," growled Ike.

"Nor the affair of the smashed rowboats," answered Harry, quickly.

"You'll pay for the damage done."

"I rather think you'll do the paying—you and Si."

"We'll not pay a cent."

"Not one copper," added Si Voup.

There was a pause. Cora was very pale, for she was afraid there would be a quarrel ending in a fight. She stepped towards the door of the house.

"Hi, hold on!" cried Ike Boardman, and ran towards her, taking a letter from his pocket. "You give your father this."

"Very well," answered Cora.

"And tell him my father wants his money right away."

"I'll tell him when he comes home."

"I think he is hiding around here and I'm going to tell my father so," added Ike, and then, motioning to Si, he moved off side by side with his crony. Soon a line of trees hid the pair from view.

"Oh, I am so glad you boys came," said Cora, breathing a sigh of relief. "I positively hate the sight of those two boys, they are so overbearing."

"Do they bother you often?" asked Fred.

"They used to. Si Voup wanted to bring me home from Lakeport several times and Ike Boardman wanted me to go rowing with him. But I told both of them I—I—well, I didn't want their company, and ever since that time they have—have acted disagreeable," and the tears sprang into Cora's eyes.

"We'll make them keep their distance after this," said Fred. "If they don't——" He shook his head determinedly.

"I expected father home before this," went on Cora. "I suppose he has had some trouble in collecting his money. He expected to collect over a hundred dollars."

"I hope he gets his money and then he can clear off that note," said Paul.

"So do I. I know the note worried him a good deal."

The boys remained around the spot until they felt certain that Ike and Si did not intend to come back. Then they bade Cora good-bye, and hurried to where they had left the sloop. It was now almost sunset, and heavy clouds were gathering in the sky.

"Looks to me as if we were going to have a storm," remarked Paul. "I trust we get home before it rains."

"Have you any rubber coats on board?" asked Fred, who did not relish getting drenched.

"I don't think so—I'll look in the cuddy when we get on board. But I think we can get across the lake before the storm breaks."

The boys were just going aboard the *Sprite* when they heard a call and saw Mr. Darrow approaching. The carpenter had a big bundle done up in a black oilcloth under one arm.

"Are you going to town?" he called out.

"Yes."

"Want a passenger?"

"Yes, Mr. Darrow, come and welcome," said Paul.

"I was going to row over, but Oliver used my

boat and hasn't got back with it," explained Mr. Darrow, as he leaped on board. "I don't want to wait for fear of getting a ducking."

"We don't want to get wet, either," answered Fred.

"I was over to Jallburg," continued the carpenter, who, it may be explained here, was also something of a model-maker. "Went over to see about a model I've been making for an inventor over there. He wants some changes made, and I brought the model back," and he tapped the bundle under his arm.

"What is it?" asked Fred, while Paul and Harry pushed off and hoisted the mainsail of the sloop.

"New kind of a penny-in-the-slot machine, for picture postals and things like that. The inventor thinks he is going to make his fortune out of it. He had me work on it in secret, and he doesn't want anybody to see the affair."

"Then you had better keep it under lock and key," said Fred.

"I do, when I am not working on it," answered Mr. Darrow. "It's a pretty costly piece of work, too," he added. "When it is finished I am to have six hundred dollars for making the model."

CHAPTER VII

A SQUALL ON THE LAKE

As the sloop left the shore the sky began to darken more rapidly than ever. The clouds piled up from beyond the hills which encircled Pine Lake and to the three boys looked decidedly ominous. The gentle breeze which had brought them across the beautiful sheet of water had died out utterly, and the air was strangely heavy and hot.

"We are in for a wetting, that's sure," remarked Paul, as some large drops began to fall. "I wish there was more wind, so we could get across quickly."

"Maybe we'll get more wind than we want," suggested Fred.

"I am afraid that's the size of it," said Mr. Darrow, as he scanned the sky anxiously. "Looks to me like we were going to have a squall."

Catching the wind as best they could, they headed the sloop across the lake. They had to make a long tack, which took them well up into the middle of the sheet of water. They had both the mainsail and the jib hoisted, but neither sail was filled.

"Here comes the wind!" cried Harry presently, and he pointed down the lake. The water, which had looked dark and foreboding, began to rise in little ruffles and whitecaps. Then the breeze struck the *Sprite* and sent her scudding along at a lively rate.

"Now we can make it!" exclaimed Fred. "Say! but this is spinning some!"

"Lower the mainsail!" commanded Paul, who was at the tiller.

Mr. Darrow, who knew something about boats, had already leaped to do so, and Harry and Fred followed. As they did this the wind increased as if by magic and the sloop was cast almost upon her beam's end.

"Down with the sail!" yelled Paul. "Quick, or we'll lose the mast." Even as he spoke the stick cracked ominously and he almost expected it to go by the board.

The others worked away frantically, but the craft was now bobbing up and down like a cork on the angry waters and they had all they could do to keep from going overboard. Holding fast with one hand, each tried to unfasten and lower the mainsail with the other. As a consequence they got the ropes badly snarled and one was put in a hard knot.

"I can't get it loose!" cried Mr. Darrow. He

was almost as much frightened as the boys, and with good reason, for he could swim but little, and the craft was a good quarter of a mile from land.

"Cut the ropes!" sang out Paul. He was hanging onto the tiller with might and main, trying to head the sloop up into the wind.

There was much confusion, for no knife was handy. The wind continued to increase and suddenly shifted, and then the *Sprite* was blown up the lake and dangerously close to a spot called Frog Rock Point, because of a large rock resembling a frog which was located there.

"We're going up on Frog Rock!" cried Fred. "Sheer off, Paul, or we'll surely be wrecked!"

Looking ahead, Paul saw the breakers as they dashed up and around the rocky point. The wind was now blowing little short of a gale and the rain was coming down in sheets.

"We are going to hit!" screamed Fred, and just then came a grating sound which told that the sloop had reached the outer edge of the rocks. But then the wind shifted slightly and the *Sprite* scraped past the dangerous spot with not an inch of leeway to spare.

"Thank fortune we are out of that!" murmured Harry. "I expected we'd be smashed up sure."

"Can't you cut those ropes?" pleaded Paul.

"Unless we do something we may run into the rocks beyond Carson's."

Harry had been hunting for his knife and now he found it in a back pocket. It was only a small affair, but the blade was fairly sharp, and with this he began to saw away on the ropes which had become knotted and tangled.

"Shall I help you?" asked Mr. Darrow. He had been feeling for his jackknife, but now remembered he had left it at home.

"If you'll hold me I'll cut the ropes," Harry answered, and then sawed away more vigorously than ever.

At last the ropes parted and the mainsail came down with a bang. All were on the watch, yet Fred did not get out of the way quick enough and as a consequence the boom caught him and swept him off his feet. He slid to the side of the *Sprite* and would have gone overboard had not Mr. Darrow caught and held him.

"Be careful," warned the carpenter.

"It came down so—so suddenly I—I didn't have time to get out of the—the way!" gasped the stout youth.

As best they could, they furled the mainsail and stowed it away. The wind still blew strongly and the rain now came down in torrents. The sky was

so dark that they could see but little in any direction.

"This is the worst squall I've seen for years," was Mr. Darrow's comment. "I pity anybody caught out in a rowboat."

"I wonder if Ike Boardman and Si Voup are out in the motor boat," said Harry.

"Oh, the motor boat ought to weather this all right," said Paul.

"Not if it ships water," answered Fred. "That might stop the engine and they would be helpless."

The squall continued for nearly a quarter of an hour and the sloop was driven far up the lake. But then the wind went down as if by magic and the rain slackened. Gradually the clouds in the sky parted and it grew lighter.

"I guess we've seen the worst of it," said Paul. "My, but it was a great one while it lasted!"

"Shall we hoist the mainsail again?" questioned Harry.

"Might as well. You'll have to mend the ropes first, though. Here, you take the tiller and I'll attend to the ropes," went on Paul. "I know more about them than you do."

Not without much work, the sail was put again into proper shape and hoisted. In the meantime

Paul requested Mr. Darrow to examine the mast, to see if the stick was sound.

"The mast is all right," announced the carpenter. "There's a small crack or two, but I don't think they'll do any harm. But it was a close shave and we can be thankful that the mast didn't go over and take the boat with it."

The sloop was turned about, and they started for Lakeport. The lake was still covered with white-caps and occasionally the water dashed up over the bow of the *Sprite*. But after the greater peril the boys and Mr. Darrow did not mind this.

"I am mighty glad I didn't try to cross in the rowboat," said the carpenter. "I should have been swamped sure."

"By the way," remarked Harry, looking around. "What did you do with your model?"

"The model?" Mr. Darrow gave a start. "Why —I—— Did I put it in the cuddy?" For the package covered with black oilcloth was nowhere visible.

"I don't think you did," said Fred. "You put it on the stern seat when it began to blow."

The carpenter was greatly agitated and he sprang for the cuddy and looked inside. There were a number of things there, but nothing that looked like his precious bundle.

"Can it have been washed overboard?" he asked, and there was something of a groan in his tones.

"It must have been, if it isn't on board," said Paul. "I saw you put it down, but I didn't see it after that. I got excited trying to hold the boat up into the wind."

"Sure it's not in the cuddy?" questioned Harry. He could see that Mr. Darrow was tremendously worried over the disappearance of the model.

"Look if you want to," answered the carpenter, in a hollow tone. He glanced around the standing room of the craft and over the bow. "It's gone—it must have been swept overboard when the wind struck us." His face grew deadly pale.

Harry struck a match and searched the cuddy. It was but a small compartment, filled mostly with bits of rope and old sails and a few cooking utensils. Nothing in the form of the missing package was brought to light. Mr. Darrow came and looked on and shook his head dolefully.

"Ain't no use to look," he said. "It's gone and I know it. Was there ever such luck! What will Mr. Power say?"

"Was he the inventor?" asked Paul.

"Yes, and he told me to be very careful of that model. Now it's gone—and I was to have six hun-

dred dollars for my work," added Mr. Darrow, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Would the model float, do you think?" asked Harry. He knew well enough that Mr. Darrow could not stand such a loss. He was far from well-to-do, and had his family and an aged mother to support.

"I think it would, it was built mostly of wood."

"Then perhaps it is floating on the lake this very minute," said Fred. "Let us look for it."

"I wish you would, boys," cried the carpenter, eagerly. "I'll pay you well for your trouble."

"You won't pay me a cent," said Paul, promptly.

"Why should you, Mr. Darrow?" said Harry. "Haven't we been using your carpenter shop for a clubhouse? I only trust we find the model."

"And so do I," added Fred.

The sloop was turned around once more, and they sailed, as nearly as they could remember, over the course taken during the squall. At Frog Rock Point they lowered the sails and examined the shore, thinking the package might have been swept up by the wind and waves.

"I don't see anything," said Mr. Darrow. He was so downcast over his loss that he scarcely knew what to do.

"Let us go up the shore a little further and take a look out in the lake, too," suggested Fred.

The summer day was now coming to an end and it was hard to make out anything at a distance. The boys knew they ought to be at home, yet they kept on the hunt until darkness made it impossible to continue their quest.

"Might as well give it up, at least for the present," said Mr. Darrow. "I'll take another look to-morrow or Monday. I must get that model back," he added, desperately. "If I don't, Mr. Power will never forgive me, and he may even sue me."

"It was purely an accident and couldn't be helped," said Fred. "He can't blame you for that."

"I should have put the model in the cuddy. I meant to do so when I came on board, but the squall drove it out of my head."

"Do you want us to mention it when we get back, or do you want to keep it a secret?" asked Paul.

The carpenter scratched his head in perplexity. "I don't want folks to know I lost a valuable model of a patent," he said. "I'll tell 'em it was a bit of important woodwork, and I'll offer a reward of twenty-five dollars to get it back."

CHAPTER VIII

A SUIT AT LAW

THE news soon spread among the boys and young men that Mr. Darrow had lost something of value on the lake, and the reward of twenty-five dollars stimulated many to go in quest of the missing package. But though the lake and the shore were searched for the best part of a week the missing model failed to come to light.

In the meantime the carpenter received a visit from Mr. Power, who came over to Lakeport to have something changed in the workings of his invention. There was nothing for poor Mr. Darrow to do but to tell how the model had been lost. The news made the inventor frantic.

"You must get that model back!" cried Mr. Power, as he stalked up and down the carpenter shop. "Why, Mr. Darrow, if that should fall into the hands of somebody who could make use of it I might be ruined."

"I don't see who could make use of it around here," answered the carpenter, uneasily.

"Plenty of folks could. It is a very important invention and we must get it back, and at once."

"I am doing what I can, sir. I'll go and look for it again to-morrow."

"Have you told anybody what it was?"

"Only several boys, and I can trust them to say nothing."

"Boys cannot be trusted," stormed the inventor. "It is an outrage—a bit of gross carelessness on your part—to lose that model."

"It was the squall was responsible, Mr. Power. All of us were afraid we might go to the bottom of the lake," pleaded the carpenter.

"You should have saved my model at any cost." And thus the inventor stormed on for a full hour and then left, leaving poor Mr. Darrow in a thoroughly uncomfortable frame of mind.

It was learned that several had been caught in the squall and some had had very narrow escapes. Among the number was Joel Runnell, who had been returning home from Brookside in a canoe. The fierce wind had almost swamped the frail craft and the old hunter had had to land on Pine Island and wait until the squall was at an end.

"I am glad he escaped," said Fred. "It would have been terrible for Cora had he been drowned."

"I hope he got his money," said Harry. "If he

didn't get it Mr. Boardman will be after him about that note for fifty dollars."

Among their friends Si Voup and Ike Boardman had a wonderful story to tell of their hairbreadth escape in the motor boat. According to the tale of these unworthies the waves had leaped mountain-high around the motor boat and they had also run through a waterspout which had all but swept them into the lake. They told their story over and over again and each time their escape seemed to become more miraculous.

"They know how to draw the long bow," declared Walter Bannister. "I heard them down at the post-office. Nobody on the lake had such a fearful time as they had."

In the middle of the week the members of the newly-organized boat club met and received the printed sheets for subscriptions and the tickets for the bicycle raffle. Fourteen of the tickets for the bicycle had been sold in advance.

"Old Deacon Jones said it wasn't right to have a raffle," said Bart. "But I asked him about the raffle for cakes they had at the church fair last winter and then he didn't say another word."

Joe and Harry each had a subscription list and Mr. Westmore had promised to put his name on both papers, and he did so, for twenty-five dollars

each. Then the boys went out among their friends, and inside of two days the boat club had two hundred and thirty dollars promised to it.

"That's what I call a fine start!" declared Paul. "I think the success of the club is assured."

"I wanted to see Mr. Corsen," said Fred. "But up at his mansion they told me he had gone to the city on business."

"He'll be sure to do something handsome," answered Link. "Just see what he did for the baseball club."

"Oh, that was because Harry hit the bull over the head with the bat and saved Violet Corsen from being gored to death," said Matt, quickly. "Harry, can't you save her again," he continued quizzically. "Just for the sake of the boat club, you know."

As soon as the boys were sure of collecting a considerable amount of money, they went to Mr. Jackson and asked him about the boat club outfit that was for sale at East Haven.

"I got a letter from my brother yesterday," answered the boat builder. "The whole outfit is to be sold at public auction on the twenty-sixth of this month. Here is a circular about it," and he handed the printed sheet over.

The boys read the announcement with interest. It called for the absolute and unreserved sale, rain

or shine, at the boathouse, of all the boats, etc., belonging to the Arion Rowing Association. The list enumerated two single shells, one four-oared shell, one eight-oared shell, two ordinary rowboats, a collection of sweeps and oars, an indoor rowing apparatus, one megaphone, and fourteen rowing suits.

"What's the megaphone for?" asked Frank.

"That's for either the starter or the coxswain of a crew," answered Paul.

"That's just the outfit we ought to have," cried Link.

"Providing the boats are in good condition," answered Joe. "We don't want any old tubs."

"The Arion Association was a high-toned affair and bought the best of everything, so I've been told," said another boy. "The trouble was, the members were too high-toned to learn how to row properly and as they couldn't win any contests they let the association go to pieces."

"We ought to send somebody to East Haven to look into this," said Fred. "Then, if the outfit is O.K. we ought to bid on it, when the auction takes place—that is, provided we can get our money together by that time."

The boys separated, and Joe and Harry went home much elated over the prospects. They found that their father had just come in, and the look on

his face told them that something unpleasant had happened.

"Mr. Boardman has brought a suit for damages to the motor boat," said Mr. Westmore.

"Against us?" cried Joe.

"Yes."

"For how much?"

"What do you think, Joe?" and Mr. Westmore smiled faintly.

"It couldn't be so very much, father. Mr. Jackson said the boat was more mussed up than anything else."

"He places the damage at one hundred and eighty dollars."

"Oh, he's crazy!" burst out Harry. "A hundred and eighty dollars! It's outrageous!"

"I think so myself, Harry. Yet he is going to sue me—in fact, he has started the suit already."

"What are you going to do?" asked Joe.

"I am going to put the case in the hands of Mr. Starwood, the lawyer. If it comes to trial we shall probably want all of you boys as witnesses."

"I guess the whole crowd will be glad to testify against Ike and Si," answered Harry. "And we can put in a claim for our smashed boats."

The next day it became noised around Lakeport that Mr. Boardman was suing Mr. Westmore for

the injuries to the motor boat. Many laughed when they heard the amount mentioned.

"Boardman won't get fifty dollars," said Mr. Jackson. "I'd make the motor boat as good as new for that."

"Maybe you'd be willing to testify to that, Mr. Jackson," said Mr. Westmore.

"I will—if you want me to," answered the boat builder.

Mr. Westmore called on his lawyer the following afternoon and then sent Joe, Harry, and Fred to the office. The boys told their story in detail and answered innumerable questions.

"We will do what we can in this matter," said the lawyer. "I understand Mr. Boardman is in earnest and is willing to spend a large sum of money to win."

Leaving the lawyer's office the boys walked in the direction of the club room. On the street they ran into Joel Runnell. At once the face of the old hunter lit up with satisfaction.

"Was looking for you," he said, as he shook hands all around. "How is the baseball club?"

"Oh, we've got the boat club fever now," said Joe, with a faint smile.

"I suppose you know we were over to your house," remarked Fred.

"Yes, my girl told me all about it. I'm glad you were there and sent that Boardman boy and the Voup boy about their business. I am going to pay Mr. Boardman what I owe him and then let him know what I think of his son."

"We are having our troubles with the Boardmans," said Joe. "Perhaps you heard about the suit he has brought against my father."

"Yes, and that is what I want to see you about, Joe. I'd like to know just what this lawsuit is about."

"He claims we attacked the motor boat with sticks and stones and damaged it a hundred and eighty dollars' worth," put in Harry. "There isn't a word of truth in it. His motor boat ran us down and nearly drowned us."

"What day was this?"

"It was on a Saturday, the day the circus was at Dallyville."

"The same day!" cried Joel Runnell. His eyes began to sparkle. "I understand it now, although I didn't at the time. Oh, what young rascals!"

"What do you understand?" asked Harry, in perplexity.

"A whole lot, Harry. I must see your father about this." The old hunter slapped his hands to-

gether. "We've got 'em where the hair's good and long, I reckon," he chuckled.

"Do you know anything about Ike and Si?" demanded Joe.

"I do, a heap."

"And the motor boat?" put in Fred.

"Exactly."

"What do you know?" questioned Harry. "Please tell us, won't you?"

"I will, boys, but you might as well come down to the store, for I want to tell your father, too," answered Joel Runnell. "Oh, this is the richest joke yet! It's a good thing I had old Jerry Flagg with me," he went on. "One witness is enough, but two are better."

"You mean Jerry Flagg, the farmer?" asked Fred.

"Yes, the same fellow who owns the bull Harry once whacked over the head with a bat. He was with me and he saw everything just as I did. He's laid up with rheumatism, but the lawyers can take his testimony in writing, I fancy, if it's necessary."

"What testimony?" asked Joe.

"Come down to the store and you shall hear the whole story," answered the old hunter, and led the way to Mr. Westmore's flour and feed establishment.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH A LITTLE PLOT IS EXPOSED

"JOEL RUNNELL has something of importance to tell you, father," said Harry, as the boys and the old hunter entered the flour and feed establishment. They found Mr. Westmore alone, casting up some accounts.

"How are you, Joel?" said the merchant. "Something important, eh? I trust there is no more trouble."

"I don't think there is, Mr. Westmore," answered the old hunter. "Fact is, I think I can get rid of some trouble for you," and the old hunter smiled broadly.

"I am glad to hear that. What have you to tell?"

"Well, it's this way: You remember the day the boys had the trouble on the lake with Voup, Boardman, and the motor boat?"

"Yes."

"Well, that same day Jerry Flagg and myself went up to Sampson's Grove to look over some trees

Jerry's brother was to cut down. We picked out the trees and then sat down to rest, for both of us were tired and Jerry was suffering considerable from his rheumatism.

"We had been a-sitting there most likely five minutes when I see the motor boat coming along the lake and pointed it out to Jerry. Both of us didn't know much about motor boats and we watched it putty closely. As it got nearer we saw that young Voup and young Boardman were aboard. They brought the motor boat to a stand-still not far from shore, and then Jerry and I saw them doing something on board."

"And what did they do?" asked Joe, eagerly.

"First young Voup got out his pocketknife and slashed a long cushion in half a dozen places. Then young Boardman took a wrench and smashed the glass to the searchlight. Then both of 'em battered up the woodwork and knocked off some of the paint."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Harry.

"Oh, what rascals!" murmured Fred. "And they blamed it on us!"

"You are certain of this, Joel?" demanded Mr. Westmore.

"Certain? Didn't I see it with my own eyes, and didn't Jerry Flagg see it, too? At first we

thought the boys must be crazy, but then we made up our minds that they was doing it for some purpose, what we couldn't tell, because we didn't know of the trouble with those in the rowboats. Well, putty soon they started up the motor boat and ran up to the shore, about a hundred feet from where Jerry and me were sitting. They didn't see us and we kept out of sight. They got some rocks and heaved them into the motor boat and then they got some clubs and threw then into the boat, too. After that they sailed off just as quick as they could."

"If that isn't the limit!" cried Joe. "They ought to be tarred and feathered!"

"And put into prison," added Fred.

"Why didn't you speak of this before?" asked the merchant. "It might have saved us a lot of worry."

"I have been away from town—up to Brookside and elsewhere, and Jerry Flagg has been laid up at home with rheumatism. He can't come here, but if you'll call on him I guess he'll tell the same story I've told," continued Joel Runnell.

"Of course you'll be willing to tell your story in court, Joel?"

"Indeed I will—anything to see justice done to your boys and the other youngsters."

"Maybe I had better drive up to Jerry Flagg's house and see him," said Mr. Westmore, after some thought.

"If you want to go, I'll tend store," said Joe.

"I will take Mr. Starwood along, if he can go," went on the flour and feed merchant. "Come, Joel, will you go?"

"I will."

"All of you boys had better stay here until I get back," said Mr. Westmore, as he left his establishment, followed by the old hunter.

"Well, this is the greatest thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Harry, as he watched his parent and Joel Runnell disappear up the street in the direction of the lawyer's office. "Who would believe that Si Voup and Ike Boardman would concoct such a scheme as that?"

"Oh, those fellows are equal to anything," returned Fred. "I'd like to punch their noses for them!" And he clenched his fists to show he meant it.

"Won't they be surprised when they learn how their little plot has been nipped in the bud?" said Joe.

"I shouldn't think they'd want to show their faces again," said Fred.

"Oh, they are too thick-skinned to let it hurt them," answered Harry.

They saw the lawyer, the old hunter, and Mr. Westmore drive past in a carriage. The party of three were gone the best part of two hours. Then Mr. Westmore came back to the store.

"We saw Jerry Flagg, and his story corroborates what Joel Runnell said in every particular. The lawyer took down the statements of both men and had them sworn to. I am going to ask Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman to call on me to-morrow or the day after."

"Do you want us?" asked Joe. "I'd like to be on hand, to hear what they'll have to say."

"No, I'll tell you of the meeting afterwards," answered Mr. Westmore.

Three days went by before Mr. Westmore could get Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman to visit him, and in the meantime the boys went to school and waited impatiently for the outcome of the conference. Late one afternoon Mr. Boardman stormed into the flour and feed store, and on his heels strode Si Voup's father.

"Well, what is this you want to see me about?" asked Mr. Boardman, haughtily. "Want to settle I suppose? If you do, let me tell you I expect the full amount, not a penny less, not one penny!"

"I want to have a quiet talk with you gentlemen," answered Mr. Westmore. "If you'll step in the back room I'll just lock the front door, so we won't be interrupted."

"I don't approve of being locked in," said Mr. Voup.

"As you please. But I thought possibly you wouldn't care to let the general public know of what was taking place."

"I am not alarmed about that."

"Nor am I," added Mr. Boardman. "The public already knows the truth."

"The public knows nothing of the truth," answered Mr. Westmore, quietly but firmly. "I have a very serious charge to make against your two sons."

"Humph!"

"We know all about that already."

"Mr. Boardman, will you kindly read that paper and then let Mr. Voup read it?" And Mr. Westmore handed out a legal-looking document.

"What is this?"

"This is a sworn statement made by Jeremiah Flagg, the farmer, and here is a similar statement sworn to by Joel Runnell."

"What have they got to do with this case?" demanded Mr. Boardman.

"Read the papers and you will see."

"Humph, some fol-de-rol cooked up for the occasion, I suppose," grumbled Mr. Boardman and began to peruse one document while Mr. Voup perused the other.

Both men had not read far when each became intensely interested. Mr. Boardman became white and bit his lip nervously. Mr. Voup drew a deep breath of resentment.

"Do you expect me to believe this pack of lies?" demanded Si Voup's father.

"If you won't believe those statements perhaps a jury will," answered Mr. Westmore, quickly.

"This is an outrage!" shouted Mr. Boardman and tore the document he held into pieces. "It isn't worth the paper it is written upon!"

"Mr. Boardman, you forget yourself," answered Mr. Westmore, his anger arising. "You had no right to destroy that document. However, it is of small importance, for I can readily get a duplicate. What is of importance though is this: What those documents tell is strictly true, and on the strength of them I do not see why I shouldn't have your son and Mr. Voup's son arrested."

"You won't dare!" gasped Mr. Voup.

"Why not? Your son and Mr. Boardman's son have entered into a conspiracy to get my boys and

their friends into serious trouble. If they were locked up it would serve them right."

"I—I must consult my lawyer about this," faltered Mr. Boardman. He realized at last that Mr. Westmore was in no mood for trifling.

"You had better do so, and you can tell him for me that I expect a speedy decision as to what you desire to do."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: As I said before, your son and Mr. Voup's son deserve to be locked up, and I don't know what the other gentlemen interested in this affair will want to do when they learn the whole truth. As for myself, however, I have no desire to blast any one's reputation. If you are willing to pay for the damage done to the rowboats and withdraw the lawsuit you have started against me for damage to the motor boat, and will make your sons behave in the future, I will not make any complaint against Si and Ike."

"Very generous, I must say," sneered Mr. Voup.

"Supposing we refuse?" questioned Mr. Boardman, after a painful pause.

"Then I shall prosecute you and your boys to the full limit of the law," answered Mr. Westmore, firmly. "You'll never get a cent out of me or anybody else for the damage done to the motor boat,

and your sons will have to stand trial for the plot they got up against my sons and the other boys."

"I'll see about this!" growled Mr. Boardman. "I will consult my lawyer and learn what he has to say. This is some trumped-up story of Joel Runnell, who owed me fifty dollars. Perhaps I can disprove what he says."

"I do not think you can, since Jerry Flagg was with him and everybody around here knows Jerry is a good church-member."

"I think my son's word is as good as Jerry Flagg's," said Mr. Voup.

"Well, you have heard what I have to say," answered Mr. Westmore. "I will give you two days in which to make up your mind what to do, and in the meantime get another statement in place of the one which was torn up, and that new statement, Mr. Boardman, I shall expect you to pay for."

"Humph!"

"Come, let us get out of here," growled Mr. Voup, and moved for the door of the store.

"You shall hear from me very soon, sir," cried Mr. Boardman, nodding his head savagely at Mr. Westmore. "Very shortly, sir, and perhaps not in the way you imagine!" And then the two visitors withdrew, looking anything but pleased over the interview which had taken place.

CHAPTER X

MR. CORSEN'S GENEROSITY

"I THINK I have settled that matter," said Mr. Westmore, at the supper table that evening. "I doubt if Mr. Boardman will dare to go on with this suit."

"It is a pity there must be so much trouble," said Mrs. Westmore, with a sigh.

"Well, it isn't Joe's or Harry's fault," said Laura. "I think Si Voup and Ike Boardman are just too hateful for anything."

"So do I," said little Bessie. "This morning, when I was going to school Si Voup went past me and knocked my books from my arm, and never said 'excuse me,' or anything."

"I wish I had been there!" cried Joe. "I'd have made him pick them up or take a thrashing!"

"Boys, you must stop this fighting," warned the father.

A day went by and Mr. Westmore received a call from Mr. Boardman's lawyer. The legal gentleman was very overbearing at first, but in the end stated that the lawsuit over the injured motor boat

would be withdrawn and that the bill for the smashed rowboats would be paid jointly by Mr. Boardman and Mr. Voup.

"My clients do not consider that they are responsible," said the lawyer. "But they hate to be bothered by going to court, and so have decided to pay merely to suit their convenience."

"You can put it as you please," answered Mr. Westmore. "I hold they are responsible, and if they won't pay I'll make them pay." Thereupon the lawyer paid the bill in full and walked out of the store with the receipt in his pocket.

"Hurrah, that's a victory!" shouted Fred, as soon as he heard the news. "Maybe that will teach Si Voup and Ike Boardman to be more careful in the future."

"I hope after this they mind their own business," said Harry. "I want nothing more to do with them."

All of the members of the boat club heard the news, and there was a good deal of discussion about it. Some were of the opinion that Si and Ike would keep their distance, while others thought the evildoers would plot more mischief.

"I'll wager they are as mad as hornets," said Link. "They will watch us and take the first chance that comes to get even."

"I heard that Si had a warm time with his father," put in Bart. "First they had a quarrel of words and then Si caught it with a harness strap in the barn."

"Yes, and I heard something about Ike," added Matt. "He and some other fellows were down to Mrs. Dandy's ice-cream parlor, and it came out that Ike didn't have any cash. More than likely his father has cut off his spending-money."

"Well, we want to watch out," said Frank. "We don't want any more dirty tricks played on us."

The boat club members had now raised nearly three hundred dollars by subscription and otherwise. The proceeds from the bicycle raffle netted eighteen dollars and, strange to say, the machine was won by Teddy Dugan's father.

"And what do ye think me father is after doing?" asked Teddy, the next day. "He's given me the wheel and I am to raffle it off again for the benefit of the club."

"Good for you and your father!" cried Harry. "I know several folks who will take another chance."

"We can print a new set of tickets," said Walter. "I'll do it to-morrow," and he did.

Several of the lads had not forgotten how gen-

erous Mr. Corsen had been to the baseball club, and as soon as that gentleman came back to Lakeport they went to see him. He listened to their plans with keen interest, for he liked sports of all kinds.

"What are you going to do for a boathouse?" he questioned.

"We don't know yet," answered Fred. "The old place we have been using is to be torn down to make room for a factory."

"I know that." Mr. Corsen mused for a moment. "How would you like to use my boathouse —I mean the big one down near the lumber yard?"

"Oh!" cried Link. "Would you let us use that, Mr. Corsen?"

"I might. I have only my naptha launch there, and I can easily keep that down in the other boathouse with the rowboats. Would my boathouse be nice enough?"

"Would it?" cried Matt. "Why, it's the finest place in Lakeport!"

"I know that, but I thought a regular boat club such as you propose might wish something still more high-toned."

"That boathouse is good enough for anybody," declared Fred. "But won't you really need it?"

"Not this summer, boys. Maybe by next summer you can build a boathouse of your own."

"Mr. Corsen, you are the best man living!" burst out Fred.

"It is more than generous," said Link.

"Oh, I don't know," answered the gentleman, smiling broadly. "Your father let the club use his carpenter shop."

"Oh, we only use the upper floor. He did his carpentering downstairs just the same."

"Well, you shall use the whole boathouse, and I will turn the keys over to you. But what about boats and other things?"

"We are going to attend an auction sale at East Haven," answered Matt. "They are going to sell the whole outfit of the Arion Rowing Association."

"Oh, yes, I heard of that sale. You ought to be able to pick up some good bargains there. But you ought to take somebody along who knows all about boats and such things."

"We thought we might get Mr. Jackson to go."

"He is just the right man," answered Mr. Corsen. "He can be depended upon to tell you just what a boat is worth."

When the other members of the boat club heard what Mr. Corsen had agreed to do they went wild with delight. And there was reason for this, for

the boathouse belonging to the rich gentleman was the best in Lakeport and well located. It would answer all the requirements of the boat club admirably. There was an upper floor which could be used both as a meeting and a reception room, and the lower floor would hold all the shells and boats they might care to store there.

"All we'll have to do is to put up the necessary braces for the shells, and Mr. Darrow can do that for us," said Joe.

"Wonder if Mr. Darrow has heard anything of his missing model?" questioned Harry.

"Link says not, and he says, too, that his father is terribly worried over it."

"It's too bad—for Mr. Darrow can't afford to lose the six hundred dollars, my father says so," said Fred.

School was to close that week, so the boys had to attend to the last of their studies and examination for the term. All passed the examinations in a creditable manner, which pleased their parents a good deal.

The auction sale at East Haven was to take place on the following Wednesday, and it was decided to send a committee of three of the boat club members to that place. They were to take John Jackson with them, and were to be guided by the boat builder

in making bids for the boats, shells, and other things to be auctioned off. The boys wanted to pay Mr. Jackson for his time and trouble, but the man would not listen to this.

"No, you can put that down as my contribution to the club," he said.

The committee of boys was composed of Joe, Matt, and Fred, and they with Mr. Jackson left Lakeport early in the morning. The other boys were at the depot to see them off, and wished them all sorts of good luck.

"Don't you dare to come back without that outfit," cried Bart.

"I guess you think we ought to bring the shells on our back," answered Joe, with a laugh.

"Got your money, Joe?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

"Look out you don't lose it," added Walter.

"No danger of that—it's pinned in the pocket."

Just as the train was about to start a boy and a man ran to the platform and got aboard. Those in the car did not see the pair, but the boys left behind did.

"Hullo, where is Si Voup going?" asked Link.

"Maybe he is going to East Haven, too," answered Harry.

"What, to the auction?"

"Maybe. Who was with him?"

At this question all the boys shook their heads.

"I'll ask the station-master, he may know," said Bart.

When appealed to, the station-master said the man was Herman Stotz, a fellow who did collecting for the firm in which Mr. Voup was interested.

"He and Si were around the depot last evening," said the station-master. "They were talking about some kind of a boat auction. I think Si wanted the fellow to go and do some bidding."

"Well, I never!" gasped Frank. "Do you suppose Si intends to bid against our crowd?"

"He's got a right to bid, if he wants a boat or anything else," said Bart. "Only, where did he get his money?"

"His father may back him up," said Harry. "He wouldn't do it for Si, but he might do it to get the best of us—he is so angry over that motor-boat and rowboat affair."

"I want to tell you fellows something," cried Walter. "Ike Boardman went out of town yesterday—I saw him leave on the four-o'clock train."

"Then he may have gone to East Haven, too. I know he has some relatives living there."

"By ginger! I know what is up!" groaned Harry. "Either they are going to bid on the boats

themselves or else they are going to let somebody in East Haven know our crowd want the outfit, so that those interested in the auction can run up the price on everything put up."

"Would they dare to run the price up?" asked Matt.

"If they were certain our fellows would go a little higher. That sort of thing is often done at auction sales."

"What a shame," muttered Walter. "Can't we do something to stop it?"

"Sure an' we can!" burst out Teddy Dugan. "I know just what was done at the auction over to Mike Cassidy's place. Me father wanted the horse and Mike Cassidy's brother Tim knew it. He said he was going to run up the price. So what does me father do but git old Jim Small to do most o' the biddin'. Me father bid up to ninety dollars and then shook his head. Cassidy went to a hundred. Then Small went to a hundred an' five. Cassidy looked at me father, but me father shook his head. Cassidy didn't dare to make another bid, for he knew Small didn't have much money and might not bid again. So the horse was knocked down to Small for the hundred an' five dollars, and Small turned him over to me father. My, but Cassidy was mad, but as me father had the horse he didn't care."

"That's a good way to do," said Matt.

"Say, do you suppose Joe or any of the others know about that Cassidy horse affair?" asked Harry suddenly.

"Matt knows about it," answered Teddy. "I told him only a couple o' weeks ago, and he had a big laugh over it."

"Does he? Good enough." Harry scratched his head for a moment. "Boys, some of you lend me about half a dollar."

"What for, Harry?" asked several.

"I am going to send a telegraph message to East Haven, to be delivered to Joe as soon as the train gets there."

"What are you going to say in the telegram?" asked Walter.

"Come to the office and you'll see," was the answer.

CHAPTER XI

THE AUCTION SALE AT EAST HAVEN

On the train the three boys and the boat builder talked about the coming auction.

"I do not think prices will be very high," said Mr. Jackson. "My brother wrote that hardly anybody seemed to be interested. Maybe you'll be able to pick up the whole outfit for very little cash."

"Unless those interested in the auction run up the bidding," answered Joe.

"They won't dare to do that unless they know the others present are anxious to get the things, Joe."

Si Voup and the man with him were on the rear end of the train, in the smoker, while our friends were in the front car. Consequently the two parties did not meet until they got off at the East Haven railroad station.

"Hullo, there's Si Voup!" exclaimed Matt, in a whisper. "And his father's collector is with him. What can they be doing here?"

"They are getting out of our sight," answered Fred, as they saw Si and the man turn and hurry

away down a side street from the station. "Evidently Si didn't want us to meet him."

"Joe Westmore!" cried a man on the station platform. "Joe Westmore!"

"Here I am? What do you want of me?" answered Joe, going to the individual, who held a yellow envelope in his hand.

"Are you Joe Westmore?"

"I am."

"From Lakeport?"

"Yes."

"Then here's a telegram for you. Come to the office and sign for it."

"A telegram," murmured Joe, and hurried to the office, with the others following. He signed the book and tore the envelope open. Then his face took on a puzzled look.

"Is this a joke, or is Harry going crazy," he said, half aloud. "Listen to this," and he read the following to the others:

"Beware Voup bidders. Buy as Dugan did Cassidy horse.
HARRY."

"'Beware Voup bidders' is plain enough," said Fred. "But the rest is a regular Chinese puzzle."

"I know what Harry means!" burst out Matt, and began to laugh. "Teddy told me all about it,"

and he related the tale of the Cassidy auction and the bidding on the horse.

"The whole thing is as plain as day now," said Mr. Jackson. "Harry has evidently learned that Voup and the man with him are either going to bid on the boats or else try to run the bidding up against you. He wants you to get an outsider to aid you in buying, just as old Jim Small aided Mr. Dugan."

"Well, whom can I get?" asked Joe.

"You might get Mr. Harrison," answered Fred. "He is trustworthy, and he knows a little about boats."

"Where can we find him?"

"I think we'll find him up at the hotel."

They hurried to the leading hotel of the town, which was beautifully located on a sheet of water called Lake Pomotac, and there Fred called for Mr. Henry Harrison, who was an old friend to the Rush family, he and the hardware dealer having had business transactions together.

Fortunately Mr. Harrison had nothing in particular to do that day, and he readily consented to aid the boys, should the occasion arise for his doing so.

"It can be arranged very simply," said he. "We will go to the auction sale separately. When a thing is put up and you wish me to bid on it you can place

your right hand up to the lapel of your coat. When you drop your hand I will stop bidding."

"That's easily understood," answered Joe.

"If you can get anything at a low price you had better buy it yourself," went on Mr. Harrison. "That will show you will buy only if you can get the article at a low figure."

The matter was talked over for a quarter of an hour and Joe handed the gentleman part of the money he had brought along. Then the boys and Mr. Jackson left the hotel by a side entrance, so that they might not be observed should Si Voup and Herman Stotz be near.

The auction had been advertised for ten o'clock, and it was half-past nine when our friends arrived at the Arion boathouse. They found a crowd of a dozen men and boys looking over the boats and other things to be put up. In the crowd was Mr. Jackson's brother, and he took them around and explained about the craft.

"Every boat and every shell is in first-class order," said he. "It is only a question of price. Anybody who can get the outfit for say five hundred dollars will get a bargain."

"The boys cannot go above three hundred and fifty," whispered the brother from Lakeport. "That is, not if they've got to pay cash."

"Well, if you need a little more I'll lend you some."

Our friends had not been there long when they saw Si Voup and Ike Boardman come in, accompanied by Herman Stotz. All three were smoking, and Si and Ike were trying to look as "mannish" as possible. They, too, began to look over the boats.

"I don't think I'd give over a thousand dollars for the outfit," said Si, in rather a loud voice.

"Do you really think he means to bid?" asked Fred of Joe.

"I don't know what to think, Fred. If he bids any such sum as he mentioned our cake is dough," and Joe heaved a sigh, for he had set his heart on buying the outfit spread before him.

"Si is a big blower—he won't pay any such price," said Matt. Yet he, too, was worried, although he did his best not to show it. He knew what the other boat club members would say if they came back to Lakeport without having purchased the Arion shells and boats.

Just before the auction began Mr. Harrison drifted in. He did not notice Joe or the others at all, treating them as utter strangers. He looked over the various articles offered for sale and began to make some calculations with a pencil on a piece of paper.

"Going to bid, Harrison?" questioned a man standing near.

"Yes, I'd like to have these things, if I can get them cheap," was the answer. "I shan't pay a fancy figure."

"I don't think anybody will—times are too hard," said the other man, and passed on.

The boys watched Si Voup and his companion, and saw them whispering twice to a man with a heavy black beard. The bearded man looked at Joe and Mr. Jackson and then nodded to Si Voup as if he understood.

The auctioneer had arrived and now he mounted a box which had been brought in for the occasion.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, in a loud voice. "If you will kindly give me your attention I shall proceed without unnecessary delay to begin the auction sale for which we have assembled this morning. We have here such a handsome and serviceable collection of boats, rowing shells, and boat club goods generally that no words of mine are needed to sound their praises. The Arion Boat Club was lavish in its expenditures, and when it wanted a thing it bought the best there was in the market. Consequently the articles you see before you cannot be beat for quality. As to price, that rests entirely with

you. This sale is without reserve and for spot cash only."

"Going to sell the things separately or together?" asked a man in the crowd.

"I am authorized to state that we shall sell the things separately unless we get two bids for the articles in a lump, and of those two bids the first must be at least two hundred dollars."

"I will give two hundred dollars," said Joe.

"Did you say you will give two hundred dollars for all the articles offered for sale?" called out the autioneer, and Joe nodded. "A very low offer. Any second bid, gentlemen? If not I shall proceed to sell the goods separately and——"

"Two hundred and ten dollars!" called out Si Voup.

"A second bid of two hundred and ten dollars. A very low price indeed. Why, my hearers, do you know that this beautiful boat club outfit cost over two thousand dollars? Look at those beautiful shells? Look at the beautiful rowboats? Look at the beautiful rowing outfits, and all the rest of the paraphernalia? Who says five hundred dollars? Four? Three? Two hundred and fifty?"

Joe looked at Mr. Harrison and placed his hand on the lapel of his coat.

"Two hundred and fifteen dollars," said Mr. Harrison. "I guess it's worth that much."

"Two hundred and twenty dollars," cried the bearded man.

"Only two hundred and twenty dollars!" ejaculated the auctioneer, as if deeply injured. "Really, this is the greatest sacrifice that I ever heard of! Did I hear anybody say three hundred?"

"Two hundred and twenty-five dollars," said Joe.

"Two hundred and thirty!" cried Si Voup.

"Only two hundred and thirty is bid! Two hundred and thirty! Who says——"

"Two hundred and thirty-five," interrupted Mr. Harrison, after a look out of the corner of his eye at Joe's hand, which was again at the lapel of the coat.

"Two hundred and thirty-five!" bawled the auctioneer. He looked at Joe. "Did I hear you say two hundred and fifty?"

Joe shook his head.

"Humph, Joe Westmore won't bid two hundred and fifty dollars!" muttered Ike Boardman to his crony.

"Two hundred and fifty," said the bearded man.

The auctioneer took the bid and dwelt upon it for fully two minutes. The bearded man began to look nervous.

"I'll wager he doesn't want the outfit," whispered Mr. Jackson to the boys. "He's only a booster, he is."

The auctioneer looked at Si Voup.

"Two hundred and fifty-five dollars," said Si, after consulting Herman Stotz.

Again the auctioneer dwelt upon the sum offered and again he looked at Joe. The latter shook his head decidedly. But cautiously his hand crept up to the lapel of his coat. The auctioneer looked at Mr. Harrison.

"I'll go you just five dollars more on it," said Mr. Harrison, and made as if getting ready to leave.

"Two hundred and sixty dollars is offered!" bawled the auctioneer. "Two hundred and sixty! Now who will make it three hundred! Come, don't all speak at once."

He looked at the bearded man, who remained motionless. Then he turned to Joe, who shook his head. Finally he looked at Si Voup, and received another negative sign.

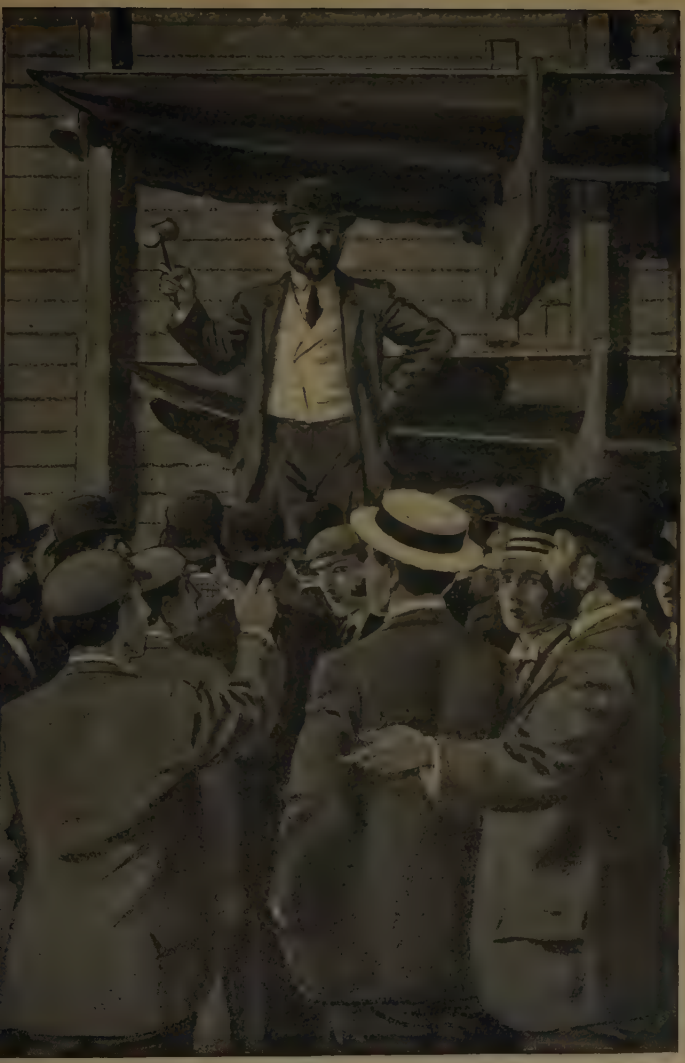
"Last call!" he said, after repeating the figures for fully two minutes. "Come, who says three hundred? Who says two hundred and ninety? Two hundred and eighty—seventy-five—seventy—sixty-five? Are you all done, gentlemen? First,

second, and last time! All done? Sold to Mr.—what's your name?"

"Sold to Joseph Westmore!" cried Mr. Harrison, and pointed to Joe.

"What's that?" gasped Si Voup. "Who—who did he say?"

"Joe Westmore!" muttered Ike Boardman. "Si, we're sold, too—like a pair of first-class fools," added Ike Boardman, bitterly.



"Sold to Joseph Westmore!"—*Page 104.*

CHAPTER XII

ON BLACKWATER CREEK

In vain Si Voup and Ike Boardman stormed around and declared that the auction had not been conducted fairly. Nobody liked their manner, and when Si said something sarcastic to the auctioneer that individual turned upon him like a flash.

"Say another word, young man, and I'll pitch you into the water," he said, and Si was glad to back away and keep quiet. A minute later he and Ike left the boathouse and hurried for the railroad station, there to take the first train back to Lakeport.

"They got the best of us that time, but just wait," said Si, bitterly.

"Oh, we'll have to square up somehow," returned his crony. "How they will crow over us!" he continued, shutting his teeth hard. "It makes me sick to think about it."

It is needless to say that Joe, Fred, and Matt were highly elated over the outcome of the auction sale, and they felt very much like hugging each other. They thanked Mr. Harrison for what he

had done for them, and offered him pay for his services, but this the gentleman declined.

"It was worth it—just to get the better of that other crowd," said he. "My, but they were disgusted!" And he indulged in a merry chuckle.

"Now, all you've got to do is to make arrangements to have the things taken to Lakeport," said Mr. Jackson, after the crowd had left, and they were settling with the auctioneer.

"Can't we take the things over ourselves?" questioned Fred. "I don't mean now, but later."

"I presume so," was the reply. "The boats can be rowed over, and you can bring the rest of the things over in the rowboats or in Mr. Shale's sloop."

"We can do just that," answered Joe, and then made arrangements with the auctioneer to leave the outfit purchased at the boathouse until removed by the members of the Lakeport Boat Club.

"Boys, let me tell you that you've got a dandy outfit and dog cheap," said the auctioneer, on parting. "If you can't win some races with these shells it's because you can't row."

"We'll win, or die in the attempt," answered Matt. "And I believe you when you say the outfit is dog cheap."

It was a happy party that boarded a train for

home in the middle of the afternoon. In honor of the occasion Mr. Jackson had taken the boys to a restaurant and bought them a substantial dinner, which they finished just before train time.

When Lakeport was reached nearly all the other members of the boat club were at the depot to learn the result of the trip to East Haven.

"Hurrah!" shouted Fred. "It's all right, fellows, the outfit's ours!"

"How much, Fred?" questioned Bart.

"Guess."

"Three hundred dollars."

"Three hundred and fifty," put in Harry.

"Four hundred," came from several.

"Just two hundred and sixty dollars. What do you think of that?"

"Fred, you don't mean it!"

"That's dirt cheap!"

"A bargain and no mistake."

"Ain't that fine now!" declared Teddy Dugan. "Sure and I couldn't do better meself, so I couldn't!"

"Three cheers for the Lakeport Boat Club!" cried a young man who had overheard the talk.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" went up the shout, and the cheers were given with a will. Then the

boat club members hurried to the boathouse, a dozen admirers trailing on behind.

"I feel like lighting a bonfire and having a celebration," said Link. "I was so afraid we wouldn't get that outfit that I wasn't worth a cent all morning. Mother told me to get some wood and I got water instead, and when father told me to take a bundle of pickets over to the widow Clark's place I took over two hemlock boards."

At the boathouse the club members held a regular meeting from which the outsiders were excluded. At the meeting it was decided to go up to East Haven the very next day and bring home the entire outfit, floating the shells and putting the other things on board two big rowboats. Then the lads set to work with vigor to get the boathouse into shape for the new shells and other things.

"Did you see Si and Ike when they came back to Lakeport?" asked Joe of the others, while all hands were working.

"Didn't see much of them," answered Harry. "They came in on the noon train and as soon as it stopped they jumped off and took to the back street. They wouldn't talk to anybody."

"I'll wager they are as mad as hornets," said Frank. "Boys, we must keep our eyes open, or they may try to do our new outfit some harm."

"If they dare to touch those beautiful shells——" began Fred. He clenched his right hand and brought it down with a whack in his left palm. "That's what I'll give 'em, and I'll give it to 'em good and hard, too!"

"So say we all of us!" sang out Matt. "From now on they must learn to keep their distance."

The news soon spread throughout the town that the Lakeport Boat Club had purchased a first-class outfit and paid for it. It made many of the grown folks smile and the girls went wild.

"Oh, Joe, it's too good for anything!" cried his sister Laura. "I've heard about that Arion outfit—Sadie Downs wrote about it. Why, you'll be just as grand as those Brookside fellows."

"Yes, and we hope to beat them—when it comes to rowing," answered Joe. "Don't forget about the flags," he added.

"Oh, the girls will provide those, don't fear," was Laura's reply.

Bright and early the next day all of the members of the boat club made their way to the railroad station and took the first train for East Haven. It was a perfect day, with clear sunlight and a gentle wind from the south. All were in the best of spirits, and Matt whistled merrily nearly all the way,

while Bart and Link tried to compose a song in honor of the occasion.

"We'll have to get up a club yell," said Walter.

"Sure thing," responded Harry, slangily. "A regular buzzer, too."

"Just wait until we get down to work," said Joe. "What we want worse than a yell is a whole lot of practising."

"Which puts me in mind of something," cried Fred. "Do you remember Mr. White, the gentleman who was staying with Mr. Corsen last summer?"

"Yes," came from several.

"Well, he used to be a regular college coach—taught the college boys how to row. Mr. Corsen told me he was coming to Lakeport soon. Maybe we can get him to give us some points on rowing."

"Let's ask him anyway," said Walter. "He can't say any more than no."

"That's true. We'll ask him by all means," said Paul. "And I'll ask my uncle, too."

Arriving at the boathouse in East Haven, the boys set to work to get the outfit into shape for removal. This was quite a task, and it was nearly eleven o'clock before they were ready to start for Lakeport. All the small stuff was piled into the

rowboats, the shells being loaded with just enough things in the bottom to steady them.

"We want to be very careful in going through the creek," cautioned Joe. "It would break my heart to even scratch such beautiful shells as these."

"Right you are," responded Link.

"Let us throw a little loose brushwood over the sides," suggested Bart. "That will keep them from hitting the rocks in rounding the bends." And his advice was followed, and the boys also put over the sides some old bagging which was on hand.

All had brought their lunch with them and this they washed down with some bottles of soda water and root beer purchased at a near-by grocery store. The meal over, Joe led the way to the dock, where the flotilla rested.

"Off we go!" he cried, and leaped into one of the rowboats. "Now be careful, every one of you."

In a few minutes the start for Lakeport had been made. In order to reach Pine Lake they had to pass through a long and winding stream known as Blackwater Creek. During a drought the creek was little more than a brook, but now it was fairly well filled. But it contained several sharp turns and not a few rocks, and the boys were doubtful if they could get through without some damage being done. They could have come around by way of another

stream, large enough for the sloop, but this journey would have consumed two or three days.

A mile was passed before any real difficulty was encountered. Then they reached a curve which looked to be just a little short for the longest of the shells.

"There isn't any use of our taking a chance on this," said Harry. "I move we haul the shell up and carry it around."

"Second the commotion," cried Matt, merrily.

It was no light task to get the shell up, and to carry it around the bend the boys had to wade in water and mud up to their ankles. All took off their shoes and stockings, so no harm was done to anybody but Paul, who slipped and went flat on his back, letting an end of the shell down on top of him.

"Ugh!" he spluttered, trying in vain to rise. "Hi! take this off my chest!"

"Never mind, Paul, it was a soft fall!" exclaimed Matt, with a grin.

"Altogether too soft," grumbled the other, as he arose and surveyed his coat in disgust. "But I am thankful that boat didn't smash in my ribs," he added.

The bend passed, they came to a tolerably straight stretch of the creek all of four miles long. But

then came a series of curves and bends which nearly drove them to despair.

"Looks to me as if we'd have to get some farmer to load the boats on wagons," said Harry, at last. "It is getting worse instead of better."

"The grocer who sold us the soda and root beer said he thought we couldn't get through," said Frank.

"Five o'clock," came from Fred, as he consulted his watch. "At this rate we won't get to Lakeport until midnight."

"I hope we reach the lake before it gets dark," said Bart.

"Did anybody bring a lantern?" questioned Walter, quickly.

Nobody had brought one, and the members of the boat club looked at each other with considerable dismay. They calculated they had still four miles to cover before they would reach a cove of Pine Lake. The sun was already setting over the hills in the west.

"Come, we can't waste any time," cried Joe, half desperately. "We've got to get through somehow —or else leave the outfit here all night."

"What, would you leave this valuable outfit all alone?" cried Link. "Why, some tramps might steal it."

"I don't think any tramps will steal a rowing outfit," laughed Joe. "But I shouldn't want to leave it unprotected. Somebody would have to stay on guard."

Again they carried the longest of the shells around a bend and resumed their journey toward Pine Lake. But less than a mile further on, Fred, who was in advance, set up a shout.

"What is it?" asked some of the others.

"Too many rocks ahead," was the dismaying answer. "We'll have to carry every one of the shells now."

"How far?" asked Paul.

"I don't know. The rocks are ahead as far as I can see," answered the stout youth, and this caused the others to be more downcast than ever. It looked as if the outfit would not reach Lakeport that night.

CHAPTER XIII

A HOLD-UP ON THE CREEK

THE members of the boat club gathered together on the bank of Blackwater Creek in great perplexity. What to do nobody knew. It was growing darker every minute and soon night would be upon them.

"I am going on an exploring expedition," announced Paul. "If the creek is full of rocks for any great distance, as Fred says, we might as well give up trying to get to Pine Lake to-night or any other time."

"I'll go with you," said Joe, and the two started off without delay.

"This is a fine boat club," cried Matt, with a grin. "We ought to organize ourselves into a walking club instead."

"Puts a fellow in mind of the Irishman who came over and was seasick," said Bart. "He wrote to his brother to join him in America, but to 'travel be land.'"

"I think we should have shipped the whole outfit

on the cars," said Link. "It would have been safer."

"Yes, and it would have cost us a pot of money," returned Fred. "This club hasn't any money to waste."

"By the way, what about the second raffle for the bicycle?" asked Link, turning to Teddy Dugan.

"Sure and it's twelve tickets is sold already," announced the Irish lad. "That's three dollars, and I'm hopin' to get ten or twelve."

While this talk was in progress Paul and Joe were walking up the bank of the creek, eyeing the many turns and the numerous sharp rocks. Joe shook his head decidedly.

"Paul, it will be utterly impossible for us to get the shells through. We'd simply scrape and bump them all to pieces."

"I believe you, Joe. But what shall we do?"

"I don't know, unless——" Joe broke off short. "What's that water over yonder?" he cried, and pointed to their left, over some tall meadow grass.

"I don't know, but it looks like another brook, or something. Let us go and see."

They hurried to the spot indicated, and there found a regular canal or waterway, about five feet wide and two to three feet deep. It was almost straight and ran exactly in the direction they wished to go.

"Let us follow this up and see where it comes out!" cried Joe, and in great hopes they ran along the bank of the little canal, which they could see had once been used for floating logs from the forest nearly a mile away.

"It comes out right into the creek, just beyond the bends!" ejaculated Paul. "I believe it was cut to save the lumbermen from floating their logs among the bends and rocks."

"Then it ought to enter the creek at the other end, too."

"Certainly. Probably we missed that opening. Let us go back and look for it."

They retraced their steps, passed the spot where the others were waiting, and followed the canal an eighth of a mile in the other direction. Here was a patch of brushwood and in the midst of this was the entrance to the creek.

"Hurrah! here we are!" cried Paul. "Now all we've got to do is to back the boats down here and enter the canal, and the rest will be easy."

"Don't crow until you are out of the woods," cautioned Joe. "I won't feel easy until we are on the lake."

It did not take the pair long to rejoin their companions and the truth of the situation was speedily explained. Then commenced the task of getting the

boats back to the point where the canal began and in starting them up that waterway. But once on the canal progress was easy, for all they had to do was to tow all the boats in one long procession.

"I never thought I'd become a mule on the raging canal!" cried Matt, merrily. "Hee-haw! hee-haw!" And this made all the others roar with laughter.

They were almost through the canal when they passed close to a somewhat dilapidated barn, standing on the edge of a wide field. They were talking and laughing among themselves when Harry saw a man approaching, a heavy stick in his hand.

"Hi, you!" cried the man. "What are you doing, trespassing on my land?"

"Hello, if it isn't old Jed Shaddock!" whispered Matt.

"Who is he?" asked Frank.

"A miserly old farmer. He is the most crabbed fellow you ever met."

"I say, what do you mean by trespassing on my land?" demanded the farmer, as he came closer.

"We are only hauling our boats through the canal to the creek," answered Joe, politely. "We couldn't get them through the bends and around the rocks."

"Humph! don't you know this canal is my property?"

"We didn't know it, Mr. Shaddock," said Matt. "We are not going to hurt anything."

"Who are you?" The farmer came closer. "Ha! I know you! You are one of the young rascals who got in my pear trees last summer and stole my best Bartletts."

"You are mistaken, I was never near your orchard," answered Matt, indignantly.

"I know better. And you were there, too," went on Jed Shaddock, looking sharply at Joe.

"I was never near your fruit, Mr. Shaddock," answered Joe.

"Yes, you were—I remember you well. I want you to get off my property at once."

"We'll get off as soon as we can."

"You can turn around and go back the way you came," continued the farmer unreasonably.

"We can't turn around," answered Joe. "But we'll soon be to the end of the canal now."

"I say you shall turn around!" exclaimed Jed Shaddock. "Ain't I master of my own property? Answer me that!"

"We can't turn the boats around," answered Joe, a bit stubbornly. "We'll get out of the canal and off your property as quickly as we can."

"If you don't go back I'll smash your boats for you!"

"Don't you dare to touch the boats!" cried Joe, in quick alarm. "If you do, you'll pay a bill for damages. Those shells cost a lot of money."

"You can't dictate to me, young man! You'll get off my property."

"We are getting off just as fast as we can," put in Fred.

"If you don't do as I say, I'll get my shotgun."

"If you attempt to shoot anybody we'll have you arrested," answered Joe. "Why are you so unreasonable, Mr. Shaddock? We are not hurting anything, and we'll be off your property in a few minutes more."

"Don't you talk to me, you young scalawag! I know this whole crowd! Last summer, instead of working, you idled away your time playing baseball, and the winter before that you went loafing up the lake like a lot of tramps."

"Who told you that?" demanded Bart.

"Never mind. I know all about you, and that's enough. I order you to turn back and get off my property just as soon as you can do it." And Jed Shaddock brandished his stick threateningly.

"We'll not turn back," announced Joe. "We are going through this canal."

"That's the talk!" cried Link.

"And don't you interfere, Mr. Shaddock," put in Walter.

"Sure and me father puts things through this canal many times," announced Teddy. "I think it's a public highway."

"It is my own canal," stormed Jed Shaddock. He shook his fist at Joe. "Go back, or I'll have the law on ye!"

To this Joe did not reply. But he motioned to his companions and all began to drag the outfit along as before. Jed Shaddock stormed and raged, and finally went off, vowing he would return with his shotgun and "pepper" them well.

"Do you really think he'll do it?" questioned Link, uneasily.

"I don't want a dose of buckshot in me," cried Bart. "Once, when I was out hunting, I got two buckshot in the calf of my leg and my! how they did sting!"

"He may kill somebody," suggested Walter.

"I don't think he'd dare to shoot at us," answered Joe. "We are not doing any harm. I guess it's only a bluff."

"Well, let us get out of the canal just as quickly as we can," said Frank.

"Just what I say," put in several others, and then

the entire crowd went to work with a will, some hauling on the ropes and others keeping the boats from running into the canal bank as they progressed.

They were almost to the end of the canal when Jed Shaddock again appeared, this time carrying a double-barreled shotgun in his hands. As it was growing dark, they did not see the farmer until he was almost on them.

"Now, will you get off of my land or not?" cried Jed Shaddock, in a tone full of suppressed rage.

"We'll be off inside of a minute more," answered Joe.

"I told you to turn back. Folks who use this canal must pay toll."

"Pay toll?" came from Harry, in surprise.

"Bad luck to him! Me father never paid a cent to go through, an' I know it," whispered Teddy. "It's highway robbery, so it is!"

"If you don't go back or pay, I'll hold your boats," went on Jed Shaddock, determinedly.

"How much do you want?" asked Joe.

"Five dollars."

"Oh, what a cheek!" burst out Paul.

"It isn't worth fifty cents," added Fred.

"NOW, WILL YOU GET OFF MY LAND OR NOT?"—*Page 122.*

"If you don't pay me or go back, I'll have the law on ye!" answered Jed Shaddock, grimly.

"Mr. Shaddock, I don't want any trouble, and I'll pay you a dollar for going through the canal," said Joe, after whispering to his brother and some of the others.

"It's five dollars, young man."

"I won't pay more than a dollar and you can't make me," answered Joe, firmly. "Boys, shove the boats into the creek."

"Don't you make a move," roared Jed Shaddock, and on the instant he raised his shotgun and pointed it straight at the members of the boat club. Some of the lads were frightened, but none of them stirred. Joe looked sharply into the farmer's face.

"Mr. Shaddock, put down that gun," he said. "If you don't I'll make a complaint to the police just as soon as I get back to town."

"I want you to know——"

"Put it down, I say!"

There was a pause, and slowly the miserly farmer lowered the weapon.

"Now, will you accept the dollar or no? I won't give you a cent more."

"Not a cent!" cried several of the other boys. "A dollar is plenty."

"Where is the dollar?" asked Jed Shaddock, after another pause.

"Here it is," and Joe brought forth a bill. The farmer snatched it and thrust it into his pocket.

"Now get off my land just as soon as you can," he snarled.

"We will."

"And don't come back."

"Never fear, we'll not use this canal again," answered Joe.

Without another word the boat club members turned once more to the outfit, and in a minute more had the boats back into Blackwater Creek, at a point where rowing would be easy. They entered the craft, took up their oars, and soon were out of sight of Jed Shaddock, and on their way to Pine Lake.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAINING OF THE BOAT CLUB

FORTUNATELY for the boys, the remainder of the trip to Pine Lake was easy, and they came out into that broad sheet of water without mishap of any kind. They had three miles to row on the lake, and it was nearly nine o'clock by the time they came in sight of their boathouse.

"Sure and it's time I was gettin' home," remarked Teddy. "Me folks will be after thinking I've been lost."

"I'll have to get home, too," said Frank. "I promised to be back before ten sure."

"You can both go," said Joe. "There will be enough left to handle the outfit."

"I think we had better send word around that we are back," suggested Fred. "If we don't some of our folks will be worrying about us."

One lad was sent around, and while he was gone the others lit the lamps and lanterns at the boathouse and threw open the double doors. Then began the task of housing the shells, which were placed on racks which Mr. Darrow had put into position

for that purpose. The rowboats were merely chained to the float, and the small things of the outfit, including the oars and sweeps, were placed in various lockers.

"Say, this begins to look like a regular boat club now," exclaimed Paul, gazing around in deep satisfaction. "What beautiful shells these are!" and he rubbed his hand over the polished woodwork of one of the long, slender craft.

Several men had come down to the boathouse to witness the storing away of the shells, and they expressed their wonder and admiration in no mistaken terms.

"I've seen the Brookside shells," said one of the men. "I do not think they are one whit better than these."

"I am anxious to have Mr. Shale and Mr. White pass on them," said Joe. "They know just what good shells ought to be."

It was after midnight when the boathouse was locked up and the boys went home. All were "dead tired," yet supremely happy. The contents of the boathouse was to them a great treasure.

Several days passed and Mr. Shale, Paul's uncle, came down to inspect the outfit, and he was followed shortly by Mr. White. Both said at once that the shells and boats were first-class in every respect.

"Your large shell is built on the same lines as the one in which I rowed when at college," said Mr. White. "The four-oared is somewhat broad, but I do not consider that any great drawback."

"I like the single shells very much," said Richard Shale. "I rowed several races in a single shell in my younger days."

"We want to know if you two gentlemen will give us some points on shell racing," said Joe. "Some of us know something about it, but not a great deal."

"I will willingly tell you all I know, Joe," answered Mr. Shale. "I have already promised Paul that. But I am more of a sailor than an oarsman."

"Mr. Corsen said you might wish me to coach you in regular college style," said Mr. White, with a quiet smile.

"Wouldn't that be too much trouble, Mr. White?" asked Harry. "Of course, we'd like it first-rate. We've heard all about how you helped to win several great college races."

"I expect to be in Lakeport off and on all summer," answered Rockley White, who loved the water very much. "I will willingly do all I can for you. But if you want to go into regular training you must promise to do exactly as I say."

"We'll do it!" came from several of the club members standing around.

"When can we begin?" questioned Matt. He loved to do everything "on the jump," as he himself expressed it.

"You can begin right now," said Mr. White, laughing. "Do any of you smoke or drink?"

"No!" came from those standing near.

"I drink water and soda," whispered Matt, softly. And then Joe placed his hand over the fun-loving youth's mouth to silence him.

"I am glad to learn that you do not smoke or drink liquors of any kind," went on Mr. White. "Both habits are bad for one who wishes to become a first-class oarsman. Now then, do any of you know anything about athletic training? I mean on the bars and rings, and the like?"

Several did, and said so.

"An oarsman cannot always be on the water, and therefore it is a wise plan for him occasionally to exercise his muscles and lung power in other ways than in working an oar or a pair of sculls. I believe all of you can row more or less already, so all I shall have to do is to eliminate your faults and add to your good points. To-morrow afternoon I will have all of you try the oars in various boats and then I can see just exactly how you stand and

what sort of instructions you need. Perhaps Mr. Shale will aid me."

"I think I'll resign in your favor, so far as rowing goes," said Richard Shale, with a smile. "I'll instruct them when it comes to using the sloop, or any other sailing craft." And so it was agreed.

"I always thought rowing was easy enough," said Frank. "All one has to do is drop the oars into the water, pull on them, and then bring them up and back."

"Oh, Frank, you know better than that!" cried Harry. "There is a whole lot to learn."

"Rowing is at once simple and yet complex," said Rockley White. "It consists primarily in lowering the oar sharply into the water, pulling a long, firm stroke just deep enough and not too deep, feathering the oar at the end of the stroke,—that is, turning flatly,—and then bringing it back over the water neither too high nor too low to the first position. In doing all this the rower must sit in a certain position, have his feet braced in a certain way, hold his hands just so, breathe deeply and regularly, and use every ounce of his strength to the best possible advantage."

"Well, that is something to do, that's sure!" cried Bart. "Mr. White, if you want me to remember all that I'll have to write it down."

"Oh, you'll remember that, and a lot more, when we get into practice," answered the college coach.

"I am almost afraid to get into the four- and the eight-oared shells," said Fred. "It looks to me as if a fellow could put his foot through the bottom."

"There is a right and a wrong way to enter a shell," said Rockley White. "You must go about it very carefully or you'll certainly strain the shell even if you don't put your foot through, as you said. You won't want your craft to spring a leak during a race."

"How about positions?" asked Fred.

"I can tell better about that after I have seen you row. Everything else being equal, the heaviest rowers must sit near the center of the boat. The best rower must be the stroke, with almost as good a man for Number Seven—that is, in an eight-oared crew," concluded Mr. White.

On the following morning Joe, Fred, and several of the others went out in the rowboats, and in the afternoon Mr. White came down and put them all "through the mill," as Matt expressed it. For three hours he kept one party after another rowing up and down in front of the boathouse and then went with them for a short distance up the lake. He made them row singly and in pairs, and watched every movement with keen interest. He had a notebook

containing every club member's name and in this he jotted down many notes for future reference. After the rowing was over he put down every lad's height and weight, and examined all of them for physical defects.

"I don't want anybody with a weak heart," he explained.

"Oh, we're not a weak-hearted crowd," murmured Matt, "and we're not weak-kneed either."

"Next Monday we'll go into regular, systematic training," announced the coach, after the day's trials had come to an end. "I think I've got some good material here. Some of you, however, have grave faults, and those will have to be corrected—if you want to win any really hard races."

"We want to beat Brookside," said Joe.

"And the Arrows, of Hoxbury," added Fred.

"The Brookside Boat Club has Mr. Fardell for a coach," answered Rockley White. "He is a fine fellow and he will probably do his best for them. He has helped to win several important races on the Hudson River and elsewhere."

For a full week after that the boys were kept busy, the coach visiting the boathouse every afternoon and instructing them on a hundred and one points of which they had not previously dreamed. They must hold their oars just so, each finger and each thumb

in its proper position. They must not attempt to pull until the oar was in the water at the proper depth, and they must not raise the oar out of the water until the end of stroke was reached. They must feather just so and recover just so, and each elbow and each shoulder blade must move in exactly the right manner. They had to breathe as they were told, and above all, when pulling in fours—they did not attempt a crew of eight so soon—they had to work in unison, or as near to unison as they could get.

"We won't do much but paddle at first," said Mr. White, and then he explained that paddling was merely rowing at an easy rate of speed. "After you have the stroke down fine I'll set you at regular rowing and then at spurting."

"We've only been rowing about fifteen strokes to the minute," said Harry. "In races they row thirty and more to the minute."

"Well, I'd rather go slow at first and be right," responded his brother.

The boys had been wondering if they would receive any challenges, and early in the following week came one from Hoxbury, addressed to Joe.

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"A challenge from the Arrow Boat Club," an-

nounced Joe, after reading the communication. "It is signed J. A. Dilks. Do you know him?"

"I do not."

"He wants us to row a four-oared race with them next Saturday."

"Gracious, that's short notice."

"He wants the course to be from a stakeboat on this side of the lake to a stakeboat on the other side, length of course two miles. The prize to be a fine bunting flag, to be paid for by both clubs."

"That's a nice prize. Shall you accept, Joe?"

"I don't know—I'll ask the others and Mr. White."

There was a consultation, and two days later the challenge from the Arrow Boat Club was accepted. It was learned that the Arrows were by no means expert rowers, and Mr. White thought the race would be good practice for the Lakeport lads. The crew to row was made up of Joe, Fred, Link, and Paul, and this quartette went into special training immediately.

"We'll show them how to row!" declared Joe. "We must do our best." He did not dream of the trouble in store for him, or of how that proposed boat race was going to put him in disgrace.

CHAPTER XV

SOMETHING ABOUT A FIRE

DURING those first days of coaching Joe and his fellow members of the Lakeport Boat Club saw but little of Ike Boardman and Si Voup. But from another lad, Sidney Yates, who had once been a great crony of Si's, they learned that Si and Ike were preparing to organize another boat club to be known as the Skimmers.

"Si says they are going to beat everything on the lake," said Sidney.

"He can do as he pleases," declared Link, to whom this information was imparted. "Only, he needn't bother us."

"Maybe he'll challenge you."

"We won't row against them. We are done with Si and Ike."

"Then they'll call themselves the champions of Lakeport," went on Sidney, thinking to tease the carpenter's son.

"They can call themselves the champions of the earth if they want to, but that won't make them so,"

and, having thus declared himself, Link turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Sidney Yates staring after him in perplexity.

The news that Si Voup and Ike Boardman were organizing another boat club was soon confirmed. A boathouse owned by a rich man who was a friend of Mr. Voup was hired and in it were placed two single shells and a four-oared shell. Then Si and Ike got together nine of the wealthy young men of Lakeport and vicinity and organized the Skimmer Boating Association. A grand opening of the club house was had, and a lunch was served which included chicken sandwiches, wine, and cigars. A band was hired from East Haven, and the local paper gave the new club a glorious "send-off."

"They had wine," said Joe. "They are going in pretty strongly, I think."

"I shouldn't think Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman would want their sons to drink wine," said Mrs. Westmore, who was present.

"Si and Ike want to be young men, not boys," answered Harry. "I guess you'll see 'em in stovepipe hats next."

"I saw them at the post-office the other day and each was smoking a black-looking cigar," said Laura. "They each grinned at me, but I didn't pay any attention to them."

After the opening of the rival boat club's house, Si and Ike and their friends were frequently seen rowing on the lake. Once or twice they came near the boathouse of our friends, but Joe and the others paid no attention to them.

On the Thursday before the Saturday on which the boat race with the Arrows was to come off, Joe was sent on an errand by his father to Glasby's Hill, some miles from Lakeport. To make time Joe went on his bicycle and took with him Fred and Paul. It was a rather warm day, so to keep from getting into a perspiration the three youths did not hurry. As they wheeled along they talked over the coming race with the Arrows and also the doings of Si Voup and Ike Boardman.

"I hope we win the race, but I am not sure of it by any means," said Joe. "Maurice Franklin told me that the Arrows can row very well."

"I heard this morning that Si and Ike are as mad as can be over the way we are acting," declared Paul. "They want to challenge us to some races and they are afraid we'll turn them down, and give our reasons to the public."

"They can keep their challenges to themselves," said Fred. "I wouldn't row against them if there wasn't another boat club for a hundred miles around.

I might do it if Si and Ike weren't in the crew, but not otherwise."

"I understand they have sent a challenge to the Brookside Boat Club," went on Paul. "I hope they get beaten, if the Brookside fellows consent to row against them."

On their way out the boys stopped at the Dugan farm, where Teddy's father treated them to some cold milk and Mrs. Dugan handed around some freshly-baked cookies.

"I heard ye had a great run-in wid Jed Shaddock," said Mr. Dugan. "Teddy was tellin' me that same. He had no right to tax ye a dollar to go through the canal. 'Tis a free waterway, so it is, an' it's meself has used it that many a time."

"I shan't quarrel over a dollar," answered Joe. "If he had made me pay the five, though, I guess I'd have gone to law."

"He's a great skinflint, so he is," put in Mrs. Dugan. "He sould the poor Widow Higgins a cow an' chated her most shamefully, so he did."

From the Dugan homestead the three boys passed around the top of Glasby's Hill and then came out on a smooth road leading to the village of Rock's Corners.

"Let us take a little spin to the Corners," sug-

gested Fred. "It is early yet, and this road is grand to ride on."

The others were willing, and so they rode to the Corners and then to another place called Brant's Mills. Then Joe went on his errand, and towards sundown the three started for Lakeport. They were now on a side road and this brought them past the Jed Shaddock farm.

"Hello, look there!" cried Fred, presently. "Am I mistaken, or is that an automobile?"

"It certainly is an auto," said Paul. "What is it doing over there?" For the automobile was standing under a tree by the roadside and was entirely deserted.

"Here come two fellows," said Fred, a few seconds later. "I declare, Si and Ike!"

He was right: the newcomers were Si Voup and Ike Boardman. They were on foot and without appearing to notice Joe and his companions they leaped into the automobile and went whizzing up the road at a great speed.

"They certainly are going the pace," declared Paul. "First a motor boat and now an auto. Wonder what they'll get next?"

"Maybe an airship," ventured Fred. "Look at that auto go!" he added, as the machine disappeared in a cloud of dust.

The three bicycle riders had dismounted and now they started to go on. But hardly had they covered a hundred feet when there came a sharp and sudden hissing sound and Paul leaped to the ground.

"The tire of the front wheel is punctured," he said, after an examination. "Got a thorn right through it."

"Wind some mending tape around it," said Joe. "That ought to hold till we get home."

The tape was tried, but would not work satisfactorily and they had to sit down while Paul got out his repair kit and filled up the hole. Then he put the tape on again and it held very well.

"Hullo, look there!" cried Fred, presently. "There's that auto on the back road. Wonder what Si and Ike are up to?"

Bang! came a sudden explosion, and the automobile came to a stop.

"Another tire busted!" cried Paul. "They'll have more work mending up than I had, I'll warrant."

"I am going over to have a look," said Joe, and without waiting for any of the others he leaped a rail fence, ran through some brushwood, and came out on the back road. He was now close to the old barn belonging to Jed Shaddock and he walked to the shelter of this, that Si and Ike might not see

him. From this point of vantage he beheld Si get down on his back in the road to look up under the automobile. Then Ike got down on his knees and did some inspecting.

"Evidently it wasn't the tire after all," thought Joe. "Must have been some of the machinery. If it was the gasolene tank it's a wonder the auto isn't on fire. Hello, they are going to start up again. They seem to be in a hurry, too. I wonder——"

Joe stopped in his pondering to sniff the air. He smelt smoke, and the next moment some burning wisps of hay floated across his face. Much startled, he looked up into the old barn. The structure was on fire!

For the moment Joe was taken so completely by surprise that he did not know what to do. The barn had about a ton of old hay in it and this was blazing away furiously. Already some of the shingles of the structure had caught and a glance convinced the youth that the place was doomed.

"Fire! fire! fire!" he yelled at the top of his lungs and then ran away from the barn. As he did so a man came rushing up, wild-eyed and frantic. It was Jed Shaddock.

"Put out the fire! Save the barn!" bawled the miserly farmer. "Put it out! Oh, I'll be a ruined man!"

"Is there any water handy?" asked Joe.

"None nearer than the canal," was the gasped-out answer. "Oh, what can we do?"

"Get some buckets—perhaps we can put the fire out," said Joe. He set up a shout. "Paul! Fred! Come here, quick!"

"We are coming!" was the answer, and in a few seconds the two boys appeared, running with all their might. They had discovered the fire just at the time Joe had first begun to call.

It took Jed Shaddock several minutes to run to another barn and get several empty buckets, and by that time the old barn was a mass of flames from beginning to end. A brisk breeze had sprung up and against this those assembled could do nothing. About a dozen pails of water were brought from the canal and thrown on the flames and then the task was abandoned.

"Well, it wasn't worth much anyway," said Joe. "It was about ready to fall down."

"That barn was worth three hundred dollars," wailed Jed Shaddock.

"How did it catch?" asked Fred.

"How did it catch?" snarled the miserly farmer. He glared around and he eyes fell upon Joe. "Ha! I see it all! So this is the way you try to get square, eh?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Shaddock?"

"You know well enough what I mean. I see it all. You thought you could blind me, but you can't do it."

"Blind you? I don't understand."

"You sot the barn on fire."

"Me? Never!" cried Joe.

"I say you did. You wanted to git square on me for the trouble we had over them boats. Oh, I know you! You'll pay dearly for this trick!"

"Mr. Shaddock, I don't think Joe set fire to your barn," said Fred.

"And I don't think so either," added Paul, earnestly.

"I don't care what you think!" cried Jed Shaddock, dancing around and shaking his fist in Joe's face. "I know! I am going to have the law on you! You're the only one was around this barn when it took fire. You can't deny it. Barns don't take fire o' themselves, do they?"

"But, Mr. Shaddock——"

"Ain't no buts about it, Joe Westmore. You set that barn on fire, and I am going to have you arrested for it. You just come with me, and don't you try to git away, or it will be the worse for ye!" And striding forward Jed Shaddock took a firm hold on the collar of Joe's coat.

"That's right, Mr. Shaddock, don't let him get away," said a voice from the road, and looking in that direction those near the barn saw Si Voup and Ike Boardman approaching on foot.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT FOLLOWED THE CONFLAGRATION

"WHAT business is this of yours, Si Voup?" demanded Fred, as Si and Ike Boardman came closer.

"Oh, I guess it is anybody's business to catch a barn-burner," was the sneering response.

"Say that again, Si Voup, and I'll knock you down!" cried Joe, indignantly, and doubled up his fists in such a determined manner that the rich youth retreated several paces.

"Won't be no fightin' here," said Jed Shaddock. "You've got to come along with me to the lock-up."

"That's the talk, Mr. Shaddock," came from Ike Boardman. "Don't let him get away from you."

"He ain't goin' to git away," said the farmer, grimly, and tightened the hold he had on Joe's coat collar.

"Mr. Shaddock, this is a shame," declared Paul. "Joe certainly did not set the barn on fire."

"If anybody did I guess it was Si Voup or Ike Boardman," put in Fred.

"What's that!" howled Ike Boardman. "Don't you dare to say such a thing! I wasn't near the barn."

"Nor was I," added Si. "We were just traveling around in our new automobile."

"Well, you stopped near here," said Joe.

"We did not."

"I saw you."

"We stopped down the road—we weren't anywhere near the barn," said Ike. "Mr. Shaddock, don't you let him humbug you."

"He ain't going to humbug me—he's going to the lock-up," responded the miserly farmer, doggedly.

A warm discussion lasting several minutes followed, but Jed Shaddock was obdurate and insisted upon marching Joe back to Lakeport. With the pair went Paul and Fred, trundling the three bicycles, and Si and Ike went ahead in their automobile, to spread the news that Joe Westmore had been caught by Jed Shaddock burning down the farmer's barn, and that Joe was going to be sent to prison for it.

News of this sort, especially in a small town, spreads rapidly, and by the time Joe appeared with the farmer quite a crowd had collected in front of the police headquarters, a small brick building, the rear of which did for the lock-up. The chief of police, a man named Butts, was present, and he

gazed sternly at Joe as he was hustled into the building.

Jed Shaddock was excited, and it took him some time to tell his story, and in the meanwhile word was sent to the justice, who came hurrying from his harness shop, for he was a harness maker by trade. His name was Black, and it may be mentioned here that he was not friendly to the Westmores, for the reason that Mr. Westmore purchased his harness and his stable supplies from another dealer.

"This is a serious charge," said the justice. "Burning down a barn is no light matter."

"Putty light when the barn's going up," said a humorous bystander in a low but clear voice, and his remark made many present laugh.

"Silence in the court!" roared Isaac Black, pounding on his desk. "If you ain't silent I'll put you out."

"Can I send for my father?" asked Joe.

"I've already sent for him," answered Fred, who was near.

Jed Shaddock made his charge against Joe and was then asked a number of questions. Si Voup and Ike Boardman came forward and testified to having seen Joe at the barn about the time the fire broke out.

"Oh, he's guilty, I know it," exclaimed Jed Shad-

dock. "He did it to git square because I wouldn't let him and some other boys drag a lot o' boats through my canal."

"It ain't your canal, Shaddock!" cried one of the men present. "It's a public waterway, and has been ever since the Eagle Paper Company gave up using it for logs."

"It's my canal," answered Jed Shaddock, doggedly.

"Silence!" roared Isaac Black. "Joe Westmore, I don't see as I can do anything but lock you up for trial," he added, turning to the prisoner.

"Lock me up!" faltered Joe, and a cold chill ran down his backbone. What would his father and mother say, and Laura and Bessie? He looked around for Harry and just then his brother squeezed through the crowd.

"Father is out of town," said Harry. "He was called away to Brookside on business. He won't be back until very late."

"Harry, they are going to lock me up!"

"Oh, Joe!"

"Say, Joe, aren't you entitled to bail?" asked Fred.

"Of course he is," answered a man standing near. "Judge, how much bail do you want in this case?" he added, addressing the court.

"Hum," mused Isaac Black. "I reckon about a thousand dollars."

"A thousand! Why, the old barn wasn't worth a hundred!" cried Paul.

"It was worth three hundred dollars!" snarled Jed Shaddock.

"Seems to me a thousand dollars is pretty high bail," put in another man.

"The bail will be a thousand dollars," snapped Isaac Black. He did not have many cases come before him and he loved to show his importance.

"I will go Joseph Westmore's bail," said a voice from the rear of the little courtroom, and Mr. Rush put in an appearance.

"Good for you, father!" cried Fred, and made room for his parent.

"Better look out for your money," said Si Voup. "He'll run away on you!"

"You mind your own business, you scamp!" answered Mr. Rush. "Joe is far more honest in what he does than some boys I know," and he said this so meaningly that Si shrank back and was glad enough to lose himself in the crowd.

After some little trouble a bail bond was made out and Mr. Rush signed it, and then Joe was released. As soon as the bond was executed Jed

Shaddock was on the point of leaving, but Mr. Rush called the miserly farmer back.

"Mr. Shaddock, a word with you."

"What do you want?" demanded Jed Shaddock.

"You owe me forty-seven dollars."

"Well?"

"I want that bill paid by to-morrow noon or I'll sue you."

"Ain't I good fer it?"

"Perhaps, but the bill has been due two months and I want my money."

"I'll pay you week after next."

"No, you'll pay to-morrow or stand for being sued. And another thing I want to tell you, Mr. Shaddock. You have made a serious charge against Joe, and as his father is not here I feel I must speak for him. If you cannot prove your charge you make yourself liable for heavy damages."

"Me? Damages?" cried the miserly farmer, startled.

"Certainly. You cannot try to injure a person's character without suffering for it."

"He burnt down the barn."

"That remains to be proved, and until it is proved he is as innocent in the eyes of the law as you are. For all I know you may have burnt down the barn yourself, just to get the insurance."

"I didn't!" roared Jed Shaddock. "I wouldn't do sech a thing!"

"I haven't said you did. But I want to warn you that you'll have to take the consequences for having had Joe arrested."

The talk with Mr. Rush made Jed Shaddock rather uncomfortable, and he was half inclined to withdraw his charge against Joe. But it was now too late, and the crowd drifted away, and Joe went home with Harry. A little later Mr. Westmore came in, and then the whole matter was explained.

"You are quite sure you didn't set the barn on fire by accident?" asked Mr. Westmore.

"How could I do it, father? I hadn't a match, or a light of any kind."

"How do you think it caught fire?"

"I don't know. But I do know Si and Ike were at or very near the barn a little while before I got there."

"Do you suspect them?"

"I do and I don't. I don't know why they should set the barn on fire."

"It is certainly a strange proceeding. I am glad Mr. Rush bailed you out."

"Oh, it would have been terrible if Joe had been locked up!" cried Mrs. Westmore, who was on the verge of tears.

"Did you have such a bitter quarrel with Shaddock when you brought the boats through the canal?"

"Well, we had a quarrel. He claimed the exclusive right to use the canal. But some folks have told me since that he doesn't own such a right."

"He forced you to pay for going through?"

"He did."

"I will have that looked into. Perhaps that action on his part was illegal."

The matter was talked over for fully an hour, but no satisfactory conclusion was reached. Joe went to bed, but it was a long while before he could get to sleep. Supposing that at the trial he was found guilty and sentenced to prison! The thought was truly horrible.

On the following morning Harry went down to the boathouse and there met the other members of the club. All had heard of the trouble with Jed Shaddock and all believed Joe innocent.

"Why didn't Joe come down?" asked Matt. "He must know how we feel about this."

"He had a headache," answered Harry. "It's enough to give anybody a headache."

"He musn't forget that boat race with the Arrows," came from Paul. "We have got to train good and hard for that, remember."

The boys got out several of the boats and went to rowing until nearly noon. Then Joe appeared, looking somewhat pale and haggard.

"Boys, I think I had better give up that boat race," he said. "Somebody else can take my place."

"No! No!" was the cry.

"We want you to row the first race," said Link. "Remember, you are the head of the club."

"Here comes a boat across the lake," announced Frank, who was out on the float.

The boat was headed for the boathouse and contained a man who did odd jobs around Lakeport and other points on the lake. As he approached he waved a letter.

"He's got news of some sort," said Fred, and ran to get the missive. It was addressed to Joseph Westmore, President of the Lakeport Boat Club.

As the others gathered around, Joe tore open the envelope and scanned the communication inside. His face paled and his hands began to tremble. Then of a sudden he crushed the letter in his fist.

"What is it, Joe?" asked Harry, quickly.

"It's—it's—Oh, I can't tell you!" faltered his brother.

"Is it about the boat race?"

"Yes. They—they don't want to row against me because—because they say I am a—a jailbird!"

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER CHALLENGE

At Joe's announcement there was a moment of painful silence. The boat club members were so astonished they knew not what to say. Then Fred gave one of the rowboats a violent kick with his foot.

"Well, of all the low-down, mean, miserable, contemptible things!" he exploded. "Why, I'd like to wring somebody's neck!"

"Joe, do you really mean to say they call you a jailbird?" queried Harry, catching his brother by the arm.

"They don't say so in just those words, but that is what they mean," was the reply. "I—I was afraid of it—it's just how some fellows act."

"Let me see the letter," said Harry, and perused the communication. It was signed by J. A. Dilks, the name attached to the challenge received, and ran as follows:

"JOSEPH WESTMORE,

"Lakeport Boat Club.

"Dear Sir: It has come to our knowledge that you have been arrested for setting fire to a barn. Under the circumstances we beg to withdraw our challenge to row a four-oared shell race with you and other members of your club."

"Mr. J. A. Dilks had better go and drown himself," muttered Link. "If I had him here I'd punch his head for him."

"Maybe they'll want to row you, if I resign," said Joe.

At this suggestion a murmur arose.

"You are not going to resign, Joe."

"If they won't row against you they shan't row against me."

"That's what I say!"

"And I!" And so the cries went on.

"Well, boys, you are very kind," said Joe, trying in vain to steady his voice. "But I don't want to give the boat club a black eye. If I resign until after this affair of the fire is settled——"

"No, you won't!" interrupted Paul. "We want Joe to stay with us; don't we, boys?"

"Yes!" came the unanimous answer.

"I move this club go across the lake an' wipe up

the floor wid the Arrows," came from Teddy Dugan. "We'll show 'em they can't be after sthepping on the tail of Joe's coat." And this energetic suggestion of the dauntless Irish lad caused a smile to pass around.

"Just wait till we frame an answer to that letter," said Walter. "We'll make their hair curl."

"Right you are," said Matt. "We'll make it so hot it will make their eyes burn to read it."

"Boys, don't get into trouble on my account," said Joe.

For the time being practising came to an end, and when the boys went home they were still discussing the situation. As a result a very short note was sent to the Arrows, merely acknowledging the withdrawal of the challenge.

"We'll remain gentlemen, even if they do insult us," said Bart.

The next day came another turn of affairs. Harry had to go to a tailor shop at the end of the main street for his father. Here he met Ike Boardman and Sidney Yates, the former chum of Si Voup. While Harry was waiting to get a suit of clothes which had been cleaned and pressed he overheard Ike talking to Sidney, and heard Joe spoken of as a barn-burner and jailbird.

"You are talking about my brother, aren't you?"

said Harry, wheeling around, with a face as hot as fire.

"Supposing I am?" drawled Ike Boardman, teasingly.

"You have no right to speak of him as a barn-burner and jailbird."

"Haven't I?"

"You have not, and I want you to take it back."

"I'll take back nothing," growled Ike.

He had scarcely uttered the words when out shot Harry's fist, to land with a thump on Ike Boardman's nose. Then came another blow which took the wealthy youth in the chin, and over he went on the floor.

"Hi! hi! stop that!" screamed Sidney Yates, in terror, and backed away behind a counter.

"Vot's der madder here?" demanded the tailor, a German named Hans Glotz. "Vot for you fights mine sthore in, hey?"

"He called my brother a barn-burner and jailbird," answered Harry. "I'll allow nobody to do that."

"*Ach du meine zeit!*" murmured the tailor. "Dot ist pad! Put dis vos no brize ring, *nein.* Of you vonts to fight you go on der outsides, *ja!*"

By this time Ike Boardman had struggled to his

feet. He was considerably dazed and looked at Harry unsteadily.

"Wha—what did you hit me with?" he gasped.

"My fists, and I'll do it again if you dare to insult my brother," retorted Harry.

"I'll have you arrested!"

"Maybe I'll have you arrested."

"I'm going, Ike," said Sidney Yates. He was afraid Harry might attack him next.

"Just you wait and see what I do," cried Ike, shaking his head savagely, and then he followed Sidney out of the door of the tailor shop and up the street.

"Vot ist it all apout?" asked Hans Glotz, and Harry explained as well as he could. The tailor shrugged his shoulders.

"I not like dem Poardmans much," he said. "Da haf me clean clothes und den da keeps me vaiting two, dree months for mine money."

When Harry got home he told Joe of what had occurred. Joe at first wanted to go after Ike, but presently quieted down. Over Sunday Ike and Si, as well as Sidney Yates, kept out of sight and none of the boat members knew where to look for them.

Two days later Joe was at the boathouse wondering if he ought to go into training or not, when a well-built and handsome lad came in.

"Can you tell me where I can find Joe Westmore?" he asked.

"I am Joe Westmore."

"Oh, is that so?" The stranger looked Joe over carefully. "I am Mark Masterson. I don't know if you've ever heard of me or not. I am the secretary of the Arrow Boat Club."

"Yes," answered Joe, hesitatingly. He knew not what to say. He felt the newcomer had come on account of the withdrawal of the challenge.

"I, I—may I see you in private, Westmore?" went on Mark Masterson.

"Certainly," and Joe led the way to the clubroom upstairs. Here he motioned his visitor to a seat. But Mark Masterson remained standing and came close to Joe.

"I am very sorry that—that anything unpleasant occurred, Westmore," he said. "I—that is—the fact is, the majority of our club are very sorry. You—er—you got a letter from Jake Dilks, didn't you?"

"I did."

"That letter was not authorized by the club—at least, the members of the club did not know exactly what the letter contained. We were misinformed by Jake Dilks, who got his information from his cousin, Silas Voup."

"Is Dilks a cousin to Voup?" exclaimed Joe, something of a light breaking in on him.

"Yes, and they are very friendly."

"And you didn't know what Dilks wrote to me?"

"Not exactly. We questioned him, but got no satisfactory answer. He said some of you were going to be sent to prison for burning a barn. Yesterday I got a straight story from several folks here and I told my fellow club members about it. They sent me here to explain to you and to offer you an apology if you wanted it."

"And what about this Dilks?"

"He has been asked to resign from the club. He was unpopular, and this is the last straw. Come, will you shake hands and accept the apology in the name of the Arrow Boat Club?"

"I will!" cried Joe, and put out his hand. After a warm handshake, Mark Masterson asked to be shown the letter. He shut his teeth hard as he read the cruel lines.

"It was outrageous, Westmore—don't think our club authorized it for a moment. We are not so mean. This settles Dilks."

"But I am still under suspicion."

"I know that—but that is a long way from being proved guilty. I don't think you set the barn on fire,

and neither do some of my friends who live here in Lakeport."

"Thank you for that."

"Now I want to see some of your members and explain to them," pursued Mark Masterson. "I want to issue another challenge and I sincerely hope you'll accept it."

"I think we shall—if Dilks isn't in the crew."

"Take my word for it he won't be."

Bart, Link, and four others were called up and matters were explained, and a long and satisfactory talk followed. The challenge was issued and accepted, for two four-oared shell races, to take place on the following Saturday afternoon, at two and four o'clock. Then, after Bart had treated everybody to soda water at a near-by drug store, Mark Masterson left, well pleased over the outcome of his errand.

"He's all right," said Matt.

"I'll wager he'll give it to that Jake Dilks when he gets back," said Link, and he was right. Jake Dilks got a great "raking over the coals," as it is called, and resigned from the boat club that very night.

As soon as it was noised around that the Lakeport Boat Club was to row two four-oared shell races on the coming Saturday, interest in the affair

became general throughout the town. Rockley White smiled when the boys told him, and after two days of practising he arranged the two boat crews as follows:

FIRST CREW

Joe Westmore, *bow and captain.*
Fred Rush.
Link Darrow.
Paul Shale, *stroke.*

SECOND CREW

Matt Roscoe, *bow and captain.*
Walter Bannister.
Harry Westmore.
Bart Mason, *stroke.*

Substitutes, Frank Pemberton, Teddy Dugan, and Kyle Fenton.

"This may not be a perfect arrangement," said Rockley White. "But it is the best we can do for the present. Now I want you to row against each other twice a day until the day of the race." And this they did, over a course nearly two miles long. Of these improvised matches Joe's crew won four and Matt's crew two. But two of Joe's victories were gained only by a length, so it was easy to see that the crews were fairly well matched.

"I hope we win," said Harry, on Friday night, "and I hope the weather stays fine."

"So do I," said Fred. "But I can tell you one thing, Harry. I've heard from Sam King that the Arrows are in fine practice. If we win we've got to hustle."

"We will hustle," put in Bart Mason. "I am going to row harder than I ever did in my whole life!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FOUR-OARED SHELL RACE

SATURDAY proved to be a perfect day, with clear sunlight and just enough breeze to make it cool and pleasant. Harry was the first to rise in the Westmore household, and he ran to the window to throw open the blinds.

"Grand!" he cried. "Joe, the weather couldn't be better."

Joe was slower in getting up. He, too, was eager for the races, but there constantly drifted across his mind the affair of the burned barn. What if he should be found guilty? Oh, he could not bear the thought! Harry looked at him and knew what was passing in his mind.

"Forget it, Joe," he said. "I am sure you'll come out all right."

"If I was only certain, Harry!"

"Well, it won't do any good to mope over it."

"I know, but——" Joe did not finish, but turned away to wash and dress, and then his brother did the same.

Rockley White had warned them to do only a little rowing that morning,—just enough to limber up their muscles without tiring them. He had also warned them about eating and drinking too much. Poor Bart Mason, generally a good feeder, nearly starved himself, so anxious was he to make a record.

Down at the boathouse a surprise awaited the club members. The girls of the town, under the leadership of Laura, had decorated the place with bunting from end to end. Some men had loaned two big flags and these floated from staffs in front. On a big stretch of muslin was painted in bright red:

WELCOME ARROWS

"Hurrah! here they come!" was the cry, shortly after the dinner hour, and two yachts hove into sight, carrying on board the Arrow members and their four-oared shell. When the youths from the other side of the lake saw the big sign they set up a yell:

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah for the Lakeport Boat Club!"

"Hurrah for the Arrows!" was the answering cry. And then came a waving of flags and handkerchiefs and the tooting of horns. The steam whistle of the sawmill let off at its best, and for fully five minutes the din was deafening.

Many sailing craft were in evidence, both from across the lake and from Brookside, and all were more or less decorated in honor of the occasion. Even Joel Runnell, the hunter, was out in a catboat, and he had with him his daughter Cora, who waved her handkerchief gaily to the Westmores and Fred as she sailed by the clubhouse.

"It's a regular holiday for Lakeport," said Bart, and so it proved, nearly all the stores closing from half-past one to five o'clock. And it was well that they did so, for nobody thought of doing any shopping while the races were in progress.

The course to be rowed had already been mapped out and the stakeboats were soon in position. Mr. Corsen had been chosen to act as starter, and a Mr. Lemming from Brookside as umpire, while the rowing instructor of a leading college had consented to act as judge of the finish.

"Now, boys, don't get rattled, and don't try to row too hard at the start," cautioned Mr. White, when the first crew were ready to enter the shell. "Remember my signals on the whistle and follow them if you possibly can."

"We'll do our best, sir," answered Joe.

With great care, so as not to strain the craft, the four rowers to enter the first race stepped into the shell and took their seats. The shell had been thor-

oughly overhauled and oiled and looked a perfect beauty, and so did the four oars as they flashed in the sunlight. As the shell shot away from the float a cheer went up.

"There goes Joe Westmore's crew!"

"They look as if they meant business."

"Paul Shale is the stroke. He ought to be able to hit it up good and strong."

"There goes the other crew. Mark Masterson is the bow."

"Who is the stroke?"

"Charley Grimes. One of the best oarsmen on the lake."

"Then Lakeport has got to look out for its laurels."

"Right you are."

And so the talk ran on, some favoring one crew and some another. All of the rowers presented a good appearance, and each crew looked equally deserving of victory.

In the midst of the excitement a motor boat was seen to approach and station itself directly in the course. It contained Si Voup, Ike Boardman, and half a dozen members of the Skimmers Boat Club.

"Get off the course!" was the cry. "Get off the course!"

"We have a right to stay where we please,"

growled Si, and Ike said something similar. But then the cries became alarming, and some boys threatened to throw rocks at the motor boat, and so Si and Ike with their cronies were glad enough to withdraw to a place of obscurity and safety.

Promptly at two o'clock both four-oared shells drew up to the starting point. Here the umpire asked both captains if they understood all the conditions of the race, and pointed out the course each craft should take.

"Ready?" cried the starter. There was no answer. Bang! went the pistol, and as the tiny cloud of smoke drifted over the water eight oars dropped down, eight backs bent forward, and the first of the races was begun.

It must be confessed that Joe was a little excited, although he did his best to keep cool. The stroke was started at about twenty-four to the minute, but speedily increased to twenty-six. All of the lads rowed well, and for the first quarter of a mile the shells kept side by side.

"Spurt up a little now," ordered Joe, and Paul followed directions and so did the others, but the Arrows spurted too, and the two shells kept side by side as before.

"They are evenly matched and no mistake!"

"Doing pretty good, both of 'em."

"Wait till the last quarter—that will tell the tale."

"Hit her up, Lakeport!"

"Show 'em what you can do, Arrows!"

In their motor boat Si Voup and Ike Boardman viewed the race with keen interest.

"I hope the Arrows wax them good," muttered Ike.

"I'd like to see them beat, too," answered Si. "But I hate Mark Masterson—he treated my cousin, Jake Dilks, real mean."

"Never mind—I want to see Joe Westmore and his crowd licked," said Ike.

On and on went the two shells, side by side until almost a mile of the course had been covered. Then slowly but surely the Arrows drew ahead. At once a wild yell went up from their friends.

"That's the way to do it!"

"They are going to beat!" cried Ike to Si. "Oh, say, if they do I'll feel like dancing a jig."

The Arrows had gone ahead a full length, when Joe issued fresh directions to Paul. At the same time came Mr. White's whistle for them to increase the stroke. They bent to the oars with vigor and the shell appeared fairly to leap from the water.

"Hurrah! Lakeport is crawling up!"

"That's the way to do it, fellows!" screamed Teddy Dugan. "Go it! Pull for all you're worth!"

And he waved both arms wildly. He was clearly the most excited person on the lake.

Now the two shells were on the last quarter of the race and the Arrows were still a full length ahead. But slowly the Lakeport boys crawled up. They were almost winded, but still had some muscle left.

"Keep at it," said Joe. "We'll win yet. A little faster, Paul!" And Paul did as directed, and in a few seconds more the shells were side by side.

"It's a tie!"

"Pull, pull, Arrows!"

"Pull, Lakeport! Don't go to sleep! Pull!"

"See, Lakeport is crawling ahead!"

"No, the Arrows are going ahead!"

"It's a tie, I tell you!"

"No, it isn't—Lakeport is ahead."

But were they? It seemed so for a few seconds, but then the Arrows braced up and shot to the front. Then Lakeport gathered itself for a final spurt. Every muscle stood out like a whipcord and the rowers were bathed in perspiration from head to foot. They were almost "all in," but did not dream of giving up. The line was but two rods ahead, they went at their task like Trojans, determined to conquer or die. Forward they shot and nothing could stop them—a quarter of a length—a

half—three-quarters—and then, amid a din of noises of all sorts, they came in the winners by a length and three feet to spare.

"They've won!"

"Lakeport takes the first race!"

"My, but that was close!"

"Hurrah for the Lakeport Boat Club!"

The cheers went up with a will. Of course the Arrows' crew was greatly disappointed, but they did their best not to show it. The two shells came up side by side.

"You won fairly," gasped Mark Masterson. "I congratulate you."

"Three cheers for the Arrows!" cried Joe, and the Lakeport rowers cheered as lustily as their fagged-out condition permitted. Then the two shells separated and both crews were taken in hand by their friends.

"It was very well done," said Rockley White. "Very well indeed. The Arrows rowed well, too, and it would have been no disgrace had you been beaten."

"Oh, it was just splendid!" cried Laura Westmore. "When you won I just felt like jumping up and down for pure joy. I hope the second crew is successful."

"I reckon they'll do what they can," put in Link.

"But if they get beaten I shan't count it against them, for the Arrows certainly can row, and they've got good wind, too."

Si Voup and Ike Boardman were much disgusted by the outcome of the race, but they took heart as soon as the second race was announced.

"Lakeport will lose this sure," said Si. "And if they do it will make the whole match a tie."

At the boathouse the rejoicing over the first victory was great, and flags waved wildly while horns were tooted until some of the older folks present said they were getting deaf. Then came a lull, and promptly at four o'clock the second race was announced.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE SECOND RACE ENDED

"Now, Harry, do your best," said Joe to his brother, as the second crew started to take their positions in the four-oared shell.

"I surely will do my best," answered the younger Westmore. "But you can't expect us to hit up such a stroke as you took at the finish. That was simply great."

"We're going to win," said Matt. "I can feel it in my bones, as the dog said when he ran after his own tail." And at this quaint remark there was a short laugh.

There was a little delay on the part of the Arrows, but presently their second crew came out on the lake and their shell took its position beside the Lakeport boat.

"Here is where the Arrows even things up," said one supporter from the other side of Pine Lake.

"Better wait until the race is rowed," said a Lakeport man, dryly.

The breeze was coming a little more strongly,

causing the surface of the lake to roughen up somewhat. Mr. White, who was in a naptha launch, mentioned this to Matt and to Bart.

"Watch the bubbles from the oars," said the coach. "They will tell you if you are dipping deep enough or not. You want just a succession of small bubbles after the eddy from the oar is gone. If there are no bubbles at all you are dipping too deeply."

There was a faint cheer as the two shells lined up, but the majority on shore and at the boathouse were too much interested to make a demonstration just then. "All ready?" was the question, and then bang! went the pistol; and the second race was on.

Almost from the start the Arrows took the lead, and when the race was one-third over they were ahead two full lengths. At once the people from the other side of Pine Lake set up a wild cheering and yelling, while they tooted their horns, sounded their rattles, and waved their handkerchiefs and flags.

"That's the way to do it, Arrows!"

"Show 'em a clean pair of heels!"

"Make it ten lengths ahead while you are at it!"

So the cries ran on. The supporters of the Lakeport crew were silent and many a face fell in keen disappointment.

"Oh, I thought surely Harry would win," murmured Laura, to one of her girl companions.

"Whoop her up, Lakeport!" cried Paul, who was on his uncle's sloop. "Never say die!"

The others did not know what was the matter on the shell. The fact was Walter Bannister had gotten a sudden cramp in one of his arms, the reason for which was a mystery.

"I—I can't make it—it out!" he gasped. "I—maybe I'll ha—have to give up!" And a look of pain crossed his face.

"Throw your fist out," suggested Matt. "Maybe you've only got a kink and it will go away."

Walter did as suggested, and in a few seconds the strange cramp went away. Then the Lakeport crew went at their task with renewed vigor, and slowly but surely the gap between the two shells was lessened.

"See! They are coming up!"

"Hurrah for Lakeport!"

"That's the way to row! Keep it up, boys, and you'll surely win the race!"

Both crews were now rowing a twenty-eight stroke, and this was speedily increased to thirty. Bart Mason was in a dripping perspiration, but pulled with a vigor which was amazing, considering

his build. Every time his oar went down it seemed fairly to lift the shell into the air. Matt watched the bubbles and gave constant directions concerning the raising or lowering of the stroke.

When two-thirds of the race had been rowed, the two shells were side by side. They now passed several sailing craft and each crew received a grand cheer. Then they went by several motor boats, including that containing Si Voup, Ike Boardman, and their cronies.

"It's a tie race!"

"No. See, the Lakeport crew is going ahead."

"Only a foot or two."

"Never mind, every foot counts."

The report that the Lakeport shell was drawing to the front was correct. By a mighty effort they managed to obtain a lead of half a length. But the pace was terrific, and it was a question if they could maintain it to the finish. Yet they were apparently as fresh as the Arrows.

"Steady!" cried Matt. "Make every ounce count now. Don't miss a stroke. We'll be there in a few minutes more."

The finish line was now but a hundred yards off, and the Lakeport shell was three-quarters of a length ahead of the other. In vain the Arrows tried to increase their stroke and cut down the lead of

their opponents. It looked as if the two shells were rigid in their relative positions.

At that instant something as strange as it was unexpected happened. Some small object came flying through the air, struck Harry Westmore on the side of the head, and fell with a splash into the water. Harry let go his hold on the oar, threw up his hands, gave a moan, and sank in a heap insensible.

"What's up?" cried Matt, in alarm and stopped rowing. Walter, who was behind Harry, did the same and caught the insensible lad in his arms. Then Bart stopped rowing also. In the meantime the Arrows crossed the finishing line in grand style, and a wild yelling arose among their friends.

"The Arrows have it!"

"Say, that was close, wasn't it?"

"One of the Lakeport boys fainted."

"It's no wonder—they were going it for all they were worth."

So the talk ran on. The Lakeport supporters were much disappointed, and Joe and the other members of the club, and their folks, were much worried because of Harry's failure to finish.

"He must have been overcome by the strain," said Mr. Rush. "He'll soon get over it."

The shell was brought ashore and Harry was

lifted out, and a crowd surrounded the unconscious youth.

"He didn't faint—something hit him on the head," explained Walter. "It was a stone, or something equally hard."

"Why, his head is bleeding!" cried one of the men present. "Get a doctor, quick!"

The cry for a doctor was answered in a few minutes by the appearance of a local physician, who lost no time in making an examination of the wound. Harry had a large lump just back of his left ear, and from this the blood was flowing. As the physician worked over him he gave a long sigh and opened his eyes.

"Oh!" he murmured. "Who—who hit me?" And then his eyes closed again.

"I do not think he is seriously wounded," said the doctor. "Yet it will be best to take him home and then I can make a more thorough examination, after I have cut away some of the hair."

By this time Mr. Westmore had come on the scene, he having been on a boat which had followed the racers. He was much worried, and what the doctor said did not tend to quiet him. The boat was brought to the shore and in this Harry was taken down the lake. Then he was transferred to a carriage which took him home. Mrs. Westmore had

already heard the news, and so had Laura and Bessie, and they went to the house with all speed.

At first many who had witnessed the race were inclined to think that Harry had only fainted, and that the story that he had been hit by something was gotten up merely to hide the truth. But when two doctors were called in, and it was given out that the youth was suffering from a severe, even though not dangerous, wound, everybody began to wonder who was responsible for the foul deed.

"It's an outrage," said Matt. "I know we could have won that race."

"It must have been done by some of the Arrow supporters," said Bart, bitterly. "I didn't think they would be so mean."

"I don't think the Arrows themselves would do such a thing," said Link. "Anyway, Mark Masterson wouldn't stand for such rascality."

"Maybe it was the work of that fellow Dilks," ventured Fred.

"It was certainly the work of somebody who didn't want to see us win," was Bart's comment. He was bitterly disappointed over the outcome of the second race.

The injury to Harry put a damper on the festivities, and the proposed celebration at the boathouse

that evening was postponed. All of the boat club members came over to the Westmore residence to learn how the hurt lad was getting along. It was given out that the physicians had pronounced Harry out of danger, but that he would have to keep quiet for a week or ten days.

"He was hit by something rather sharp, presumably a stone," said one of the doctors. "It came with such force that it could not have been thrown by hand."

"Perhaps somebody used a sling-shot or an air gun," said Joe.

"More than likely. Had it struck your brother much harder it might have cracked his skull and killed him."

"I only hope we can catch the rascal who did it," put in Mr. Westmore. "I'll make him pay dearly for his dirty trick. Sport is one thing; such underhand work is quite another."

"Just think! They might have killed Harry!" cried Laura. "It is dreadful."

"I don't think anybody meant to go as far as that," answered Joe. "But it was a contemptible thing to do, nevertheless."

Some of the boat club members were out on the piazza talking the situation over when they saw three boys approaching. As the newcomers came

closer, they recognized Mark Masterson and others of the Arrows.

"We came over to learn how Harry Westmore is getting along," said Mark. "And we also came to let you know that the Arrows had nothing to do with this bit of foul play and that we do not stand for it."

"Have you any idea who did it?" asked Link.

"Not the slightest. We have questioned a number of fellows, but they all say they saw nothing thrown or shot at your boat."

"Harry is out of danger, but badly hurt," said Fred. "We'd like to catch the fellow who did it."

"So would we," said Bob Carker, one of the newcomers. "We feel that this happening casts a shadow over our reputation. If we can catch the guilty party we'll certainly hand him over to the authorities."

"And we want to say more than that," said Alfred Yale, the third member of the Arrows and who had been the captain of the shell in the second race. "The race was given to us, but we have declined to accept it and have asked that the race be rowed over again, at some future time when Harry Westmore is well again."

"You've really done that?" asked Fred. "It is certainly generous of you."

"No, we consider it only fair," answered Alfred Yale. "We want good, clean sport or none."

After that the situation was talked over for a good hour, and the members of the two boat clubs became the best of friends. All resolved to do everything in their power to bring the guilty party to justice; and then the meeting broke up, and the lads went home.

CHAPTER XX

ANOTHER CHALLENGE, AND A SURPRISE

HAVING a good, strong constitution, Harry mended rapidly, and at the end of one week felt quite like himself again. But his mother insisted that he should keep quiet a week longer, and to please her he consented, and did little but lie in a hammock under the trees in the pretty garden which the Westmore home boasted. Here many of the other boys came to see him, and Link read two books aloud to him.

"By the way, Link," asked Harry one day. "Has your father heard anything more of that missing model?"

"Not a thing," answered the carpenter's son, and gave a deep sigh.

"I suppose he is worried—or has he settled the matter?"

"No, Mr. Power, the inventor, won't settle. He wants my father to get the model back. He says if it is not found he'll be ruined."

"And your father won't get his six hundred dollars, I suppose?"

"Exactly. I wish the model could be found."

"Have you looked for it lately?"

"Yes, my father and I have been out half a dozen times, but so far we haven't got the slightest trace," answered Link.

During those days the Lakeport Boat Club received a formal challenge from the Brookside Club to row a series of races, for four prizes, said prizes to be decided upon later. Three sets of races were proposed, the first to consist of two (or three) single-shell races; the second to consist of two (or three) four-oared shell races; and the third to consist of one eight-oared race. The winner of any one set was to have a prize, and the boat club winning two sets out of three was to have the fourth, or extra prize. The last race—the eight-oared—was to be rowed even if one club or the other won the first two sets, but no third race was to be rowed in the first or second set if either club won the first two races in such set. It was suggested that the sets be rowed on following Saturdays, the last two Saturdays in August and the first Saturday in September, weather permitting, preferred.

"That suits me," said Joe, after reading the challenge carefully. "We can have the single-shell races first, then the four-oared races, and last the eight-oared race."

"There are a lot of details to be arranged," said Matt. "But this challenge just suits me."

A reply was sent to the Brookside Club, and as a result George Dixon, Roy Willetts, and several others from the town at the upper end of the lake came down to Lakeport to talk the matter over. In the meantime some rich gentlemen from both places heard of the challenge and they made up a purse of three hundred dollars, to be used in the purchase of prizes and in hiring a band for the several occasions.

"I am glad we are to have these races," said George Dixon. "It will give us fellows a chance to even up on those baseball games we lost last summer."

One conference was followed by another, and many arrangements were made which need not be mentioned. Both clubs approved of what had been done, and each went to practising with renewed vigor.

"We have put a big spoke in Si Voup's wheel," said Matt, one day, when he and some of the others were on their way to the boathouse.

"How is that?" asked Fred, with interest.

"You know Si and Ike Boardman are very anxious to push their boat club to the front and get some matches. Well, they sent a challenge to the

Brooksides, and got back word that since they had arranged with us all of their dates were filled."

"Phew! that must have made Si and Ike mad," was Paul's comment.

"They were boiling, so a fellow told me. They sent a most sarcastic letter to George Dixon, saying he was afraid to row them, and George simply sent the letter back."

"If Si and Ike keep on they won't have any friends left," said Fred. "They are growing more arrogant, both of 'em, every time I meet them."

The club members now went into practice with more care than ever. Rockley White gave them instructions three times a week, not only in rowing, but also in physical training. A small gymnasium had been installed at the boathouse, and this they used constantly. The coach showed them how to breathe properly, and make the most of their lung power, and also showed them how to strengthen the muscles of their backs and arms, so that they might pull long, telling strokes with the oars.

"All of you did very well in your races with the Arrows," said the coach. "But I want to tell you frankly that the Brookside Club is a different and harder proposition. Those boys have the best of shells, and their trainer is second to none for

thoroughness. If you win a victory over them you'll have to work hard for it."

"We'll work for all we are worth," answered Joe, and his chums said the same.

That afternoon Fred had to assist his father at the hardware store, and while the stout youth was at work Mr. Munroe Corsen came in. The rich gentleman had become quite friendly with Mr. Rush, and he sat down in an easy-chair by a side door to chat on various subjects.

"I have had some curious business experiences lately," said Munroe Corsen. "I believe I told you a syndicate wished to purchase my interest in that oilcloth company."

"Yes, you did," answered Mr. Rush. "Have you settled with them?"

"By no means. First they wanted to force me out—said I had no rights they wanted to buy. After that they offered me two thousand dollars for my interest. Then I offered to sell to them for twenty thousand dollars, and they went up in the air. They said they would give me three thousand dollars and not a cent more."

"And what have you done, if I may ask?" questioned Mr. Rush, with pardonable curiosity.

"I told them they could either buy me out for twenty thousand dollars or I was going to take

the matter to court. I have found out that some things they have been doing are not legal. They are very angry, and at our last interview one of the fellows, a burly man named Cranshaw, almost pitched into me."

"In that case you had better watch them, Mr. Corsen. You won't want them to do you any bodily injury."

"I shall watch them, and if they do attack me I'll have them locked up."

Fred was quite interested in this talk, and after Mr. Corsen left questioned his parent concerning it.

"I do not know the particulars of this oilcloth company deal," said Mr. Rush. "But I have heard elsewhere, from some men in the city, that the opposition are anxious to get rid of Mr. Corsen. He holds the rights to manufacture a certain kind of oilcloth and they want to get those rights away from him."

Several days went by and Harry joined his chums. The wound on his head had healed completely and he felt like himself once more. He took a walk to the town green and there found half a dozen of the club members engaged in a game of ball with some other lads of Lakeport.

"Can't give up baseball completely," said Paul. "It's too nice."

"Right you are," answered Harry, and was soon in the game himself, although he took care not to exercise too violently.

The lads had divided into two sides of eight players each and were playing a game of five innings. Joe was captain on one side, and Paul was captain on the other. At the end of the second innings the score stood 6 to 7 in favor of Joe's side.

"That's a pretty even game," said Link. "It shows that it doesn't do to let the old team play against itself. You've got three players of the old baseball club on each side here."

"Here is where I make a home run!" sang out Paul, as he went to the bat, and he sent a long fly to center field and ran the bases with great swiftness.

"Just as good a runner as ever," declared Joe, and clapped his hands. "That's like a whiff of old times, eh?"

At the end of the fourth innings the score stood 9 to 10 in favor of Joe's side.

"Here, this won't do," declared Paul. "We've got to hump ourselves and win;" and his side went in with such vigor that they made four runs before they were put out.

"13 to 10," said Link. "Now then, we've got to make three to tie and four to win this game."

Link was first to the bat and he managed to get

to first on a clean hit to center. Then Bart followed and also got to first, while Link went to third. Then Joe hit the ball good and hard and brought in two runs while he himself reached third.

"Hurrah, that's the way to do it!" cried Harry. "Now, Joe, come in and you'll tie the score."

The next boy at the bat was caught out on a foul, and the second batter got to first on balls. Then another player took up the stick and advanced to the home plate.

"Say, what's the excitement about?" asked one of the boys, suddenly, looking over to the main street of the town.

"Must be a fire or a runaway," said another. "I'm going over."

"Oh, come, let us finish the game!" cried Paul.

But some of the other boys would not listen, for they saw a number of men running up towards the Corsen mansion. Others followed, including a local policeman.

"Something is wrong, that's certain," said Joe. "Let us go and see. We can finish this game some other time."

By this time nearly everybody in that vicinity was running toward the Corsen mansion. The men and boys were followed by women and girls, until the crowd numbered at least a hundred.

"What's up?" asked Fred, who was one of the first of the ball players to reach the gate to the elegant grounds.

"It's about Mr. Corsen's daughter Violet," answered a man. "Too bad, I do declare."

"What about her?" asked Paul.

"She was down at the dock, with a friend of hers named Nellie Davis. Some men came along in a boat. They had masks over their faces, and they drove Nellie into the boathouse and locked the door on her. They then put Violet in their boat and went away with her. Nellie began to scream, and the man-of-all-work ran out of the barn and down to the boathouse and let her out, but by that time the boat with the men and Violet on board was out of sight up the lake."

CHAPTER XXI

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF VIOLET

"Do you mean to say that Violet Corsen has been kidnapped?" cried Fred, in amazement.

"It certainly looks like it. Mrs. Corsen is wild over it," went on the man.

"Where is Mr. Corsen?"

"Away to the city on business."

By this time all of the boys had arrived on the scene and they, with many others, took themselves to the lake front, where the abduction had occurred. The boys were deeply stirred, for all knew the rich man's daughter, and many were her warm friends.

"This is the worst outrage I ever heard of!" declared Harry. "To run away with such a nice girl as Violet. I hope they catch the rascals."

"What do you suppose they intend to do with her?" asked Matt.

"Hold her for money, I guess," answered Paul. "Don't you remember about that case in the city several years ago, when they ran off with a little boy and made the father give up ten thousand dollars for his safe return?"

"Maybe it was only a joke," suggested Bart. He was so good-natured himself that he could not imagine anybody doing so wicked a deed as that mentioned.

The crowd was overrunning the grounds and the lake front, while several went off to get their boats, in which to make a search up the lake. In the mansion Nellie Davis was trying to tell her story in all of its details, but was so excited she could scarcely make herself understood. Mrs. Corsen was hysterical, and a doctor had to be summoned to give her something to quiet her. It was the most exciting time Lakeport had ever experienced, and business was practically suspended. The police were on hand, but knew no more about what to do than anybody else.

"Violet and I were at the edge of the little dock, when the boat with the strange men came up," said Nellie Davis, when she had calmed down somewhat. "The boat was painted dark green, and had some kind of a motor to run it. I didn't see the name. There were two men, and they wore dark slouch hats and dark bits of cloth tied over their faces. One caught hold of me and the other man grabbed Violet. I started to scream and so did Violet, and the men put their hands over our mouths to stop us. Then the man who held me took me in his

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arms—he was tall and strong—and carried me into the boathouse, and while he did this the other man—he was short and stout—pulled Violet down into the boat. As soon as I was in the boathouse the man shoved me into the oar closet and bolted the door on me. Then he ran away, and that was the last I saw of him. I was so scared I couldn't get my breath and I thought I was going to faint. But as soon as I could do it, I screamed, and then Nelson came and let me out and asked what was the matter."

"She was so scared she couldn't speak at first," said the man-of-all-work. "She just kept saying 'Violet! Violet!' all the time. Then she pointed to the lake, and I managed to make out that some men had taken the little missus away—Heaven save her! I ran down to the water, but all the boats in sight were so far away I couldn't make out who was on board any of 'em."

This was as much as the hired man could tell, and as he was not a particularly bright individual, although very faithful, his testimony did little to clear up the mystery. Asked to describe the two men, Nellie could simply repeat that one was tall and the other short, and added that the tall man had a decided droop to his left shoulder, and wore light-colored shoes.

Without delay all the strangers who had been in

town for the past week were recalled by the various inhabitants. Some thought they could remember seeing the tall man with the droop to his left shoulder hanging around the Corsen grounds, but nobody was positive.

Of course Joe and his friends took a tremendous interest in what had occurred. Harry was particularly worried, for since the day he had rescued Violet from the attacks of an angry bull on the main street of Lakeport the youth and the girl had been warm friends.

"I do hope they get on the track of the fellows who carried Violet off," said he to his brother.

"We might go up the lake in Mr. Shale's sloop and look around," suggested Joe. Paul had already spoken of this, and gone off to get his uncle's craft.

"Yes, let us do that by all means," answered Harry.

Mr. Shale was on hand and he readily consented to let the boys go up the lake in the *Sprite,* and, as the sloop was large, ten of the lads availed themselves of the opportunity. In the meantime somebody telegraphed for Mr. Corsen to come home at once, stating it was of particular importance. Nobody had the heart to tell the rich man that his daughter had been carried off.

There was a brisk breeze blowing from down the lake, and with the mainsail and jib up, the *Sprite* cut the water in fine fashion. Nobody knew exactly where to go, but as other parties had crossed the lake, Paul and Joe argued it would be best to keep on in the direction of Pine Island and Brookside.

"Do you think they'll dare to take Violet to Brookside or any other town?" asked Link. "If they did that, somebody would surely spot them."

"They won't dare to enter any town in the daylight, but they may do it after dark," answered Joe.

"Maybe they'll go to some lonely spot along the lake shore, or on Pine Island," suggested Frank. "There are a hundred such places."

"I am afraid it will be like looking for a pin in a haystack," said Bart. "But we'll do the best we can. If a whole lot of parties go out one of them may run across some clew."

Soon the *Sprite* was out of sight of Lakeport. Paul was at the tiller and the other lads had little to do. Several were at the bow, and they kept their eyes on the alert for anything which might look like a motor boat painted dark green.

Inside of an hour the sloop was well on its way to Brookside. Paul kept the craft close to the west shore of the lake, intending to return by way

of the east shore, so far as the wind would permit. Thus they would practically round Pine Island, and could keep an eye over there as well as on the mainland.

"Fellows who would carry off an innocent girl in this fashion must be thoroughly hard-hearted," said Matt. "I just wish I could lay my hands on them!"

"You'll find them hard-hearted enough," answered Joe, "and if we come in reach of them you be mighty careful. Men who will do such a deed are desperate characters, and they'll do anything rather than allow themselves to be captured. Why, if they were cornered they might even do some shooting."

"Excuse me, but I don't want to git shot nohow," protested Teddy Dugan. "When they shoot at me I want to be miles away!"

At last the sloop came in sight of Brookside, and the boys went ashore and spread the news of how Violet had been carried off. Almost one of the first persons they met was George Dixon.

"What a shame," said the leader of the Brookside Boat Club. "We'll certainly spread the news here, and notify the police, too."

"They have been notified, by telephone," answered Fred.

Some of the Brookside boys went out in a naptha

launch, and while they skirted the extreme north shore of the lake, the *Sprite* was brought about, and the run along the eastern shore was begun.

"Shall we stop at Pine Island?" asked Paul.

"I don't think they'd dare to go there," answered Matt. "They would expect to be rooted out sooner or later. Let us watch the mainland;" and so it was decided.

It was growing dark when Bart, who was one of the party at the bow of the sloop, uttered a cry:

"I see a motor boat and there are several people in it!"

"Where is it?" questioned the others, in a breath.

"There, back of the trees in yonder cove," and the big youth pointed with his hand.

The tiller of the *Sprite* was swung over and the craft headed for the cove in question. Then the others saw the motor boat, just as it passed between some brushwood fringing the edge of the cove.

"I wish we were armed," said Joe.

"There is a pistol on board, in the cuddy," answered Paul, "but I don't know if it is good for anything."

Joe went in search of the weapon, and presently brought it to light from a pile of old junk. The pistol was old and rusty and its days of usefulness were over.

"We can never use that," said Fred.

"We can use it to scare somebody with," said Harry. "Only don't try to pull the trigger, for it may be loaded, and if it is it may go off and go to pieces at the same time, and hurt somebody."

Soon the *Sprite* swept into the cove. To the surprise of all on board, the motor boat was nowhere to be seen!

"Well, this is certainly strange," murmured Bart. "I saw that boat as plain as the nose on my face."

"Listen!" said Joe, and held up his hand. They heard a faint put-put-put! coming from a small creek at the end of the cove.

"The motor boat is in there!" cried Harry. "Let us pole the sloop over."

The mainsail had been lowered, and they went to work with oars and poles to bring the *Sprite* up to the mouth of the creek. This was no light task and before it was accomplished the put-put-put! had ceased and all in that vicinity was as quiet as a graveyard.

"Be careful, fellows," said Paul, in a half-whisper. "We don't want to run into any trap."

The sloop was still some thirty yards from the shore when there was a movement among the bushes lining the creek and two men stepped forward into

the open. Each wore a slouch hat and mask over his face and each carried a shotgun in his hands.

"Stop!" called out the taller of the pair. "Don't you dare to come a foot closer!"

"Hello! We've tracked them!" cried Harry. "You rascals, what have you done with Violet Corsen?" he called out.

CHAPTER XXII

FORCED TO RETREAT

ALL of the boys on the sloop were taken aback by the sudden appearance of the two masked men, and it did not tend to quiet their fears when the two fellows raised their shotguns and pointed them in the direction of the *Sprite*.

"I told you to stop!" called the tall fellow, both ignoring Harry's question regarding the whereabouts of the missing girl.

"What have you done with Violet Corsen?" questioned Harry, again.

"If you don't stop we'll surely shoot you!" called the short man, and pointed his weapon point blank at Harry.

At this, all of the boys using the poles and oars stopped their labors. The water was flowing from the creek into the lake and this had a tendency to cause the *Sprite* to drift out of the cove.

"Boys, what shall we do?" asked Joe, in a whisper.

"We certainly don't want to get shot," said Link. "They talk as if they meant business."

"Can't we get ashore on the sly and attack them that way?" suggested Bart.

"We might threaten them with the old pistol," put in Walter.

"Yes, and get shot at for our pains," answered Harry. "No, we must be careful."

"Listen!" shouted the tall man. "We will give you two minutes in which to get out of the cove. If you are not out and on the lake by that time we'll open fire on you, and you'll get four doses of buckshot in your hides."

"Let us get out," whispered Teddy Dugan. "Sure we can do nothin' here but git shot full o' holes! Let us try to capture them some other time."

"Will you tell us what you have done with Violet Corsen?" asked Joe.

"We don't know anything about such a person," answered the short man.

"We know better. You carried her off."

"See here—you get out and be quick!" growled the tall man. "I'll give you just one minute more and no longer. And don't you dare to come back either."

There was no help for it, and with downcast hearts the boys on the *Sprite* poled the craft to the mouth of the cove and out into Pine Lake. The

two men skirted the edge of the cove, one on either side, and came out on the lake front.

"Now, we want you to set sail for Lakeport!" commanded the tall man. "We are going to watch you out of sight. If you attempt to come back we'll fire on you as sure as fate."

"Oh, if we only had our guns!" murmured Fred. "I reckon we could shoot as well as they can!"

"I wish some other vessel would come along," said Paul, looking vainly up and down the lake for some sign of a craft.

There was no help for it, and, running up the mainsail, the *Sprite* was headed in the direction of Lakeport. Then came a sudden bang! and a charge of buckshot tore through the mainsail just above the boys' heads.

"Oh!" yelled Link, and sprawled flat, while Matt did the same.

"I suppose they did that to scare us," was Joe's comment.

"Well, it scared me right enough," said Link.

"And me, too," admitted Matt. "They are certainly watching us," he added.

With hearts full of bitterness, but feeling utterly helpless, the boys continued to steer the sloop in the direction of home. What to do next they did

not know. The darkness of the summer night was now falling rapidly.

"We might go back in the dark," suggested Harry.

"Yes, after we have gotten help and armed ourselves," answered his brother.

The cove had just vanished from their view when they saw a rowboat ahead. As they approached the craft they discovered that it contained Joel Runnell. The old hunter had been to Brookside for some provisions which were heaped up on the stern seat.

"Hello!" sang out Fred. "Joel Runnell! Stop!"

"How are you, boys!" answered the old hunter, as he recognized them. "Having a sail, eh? That's good."

"We want to see you!" cried Joe. "Have you heard the news about Violet Corsen?"

"Somebody up Brookside way said some men had kidnapped her, but I didn't believe the yarn."

"It is true; and we just got on the track of the rascals."

"You don't say! Where are they?" And Runnell rowed up to the side of the *Sprite* as the boys lowered the mainsail.

The story of the adventure at the cove was speedily related, the old hunter listening with wide

open eyes to the recital. He shook his head and shut his teeth with a snap.

"Sech fellows ought to be strung up," he said, emphatically. "An' in the old days it wouldn't have taken long to find men to do the job, nuther. I must look into this and see if I can save the gal."

"I thought you would do something. We want to help, too," said Joe. "Have you a gun with you —or a pistol?"

"No, but I've got two guns and two pistols over to my cabin," answered Joel Runnell. "If you want to come with me we can see what's to be done."

"Of course! At least I'll go," said Joe.

All of the others wanted to go, too, and in the end the sloop was sailed to the shore, and Runnell and Joe fairly ran to the old hunter's home and back. At the place Joe met Cora, but took no time to talk to her. She began to worry when she saw her parent get out the firearms.

"Little Violet Corsen has been kidnapped!" explained the father. "We are going to rescue her —if we can;" and then he and Joe were off, leaving Cora gazing after them anxiously.

It was now quite dark, with only some stars showing in the heavens. The breeze still blew up the lake, for which they were thankful. As soon as Joe and Runnell got back, the sails of the *Sprite*

were again hoisted and they stood up the east shore, almost straight for the cove.

As the sloop bowled over the course the old hunter sat down and with the aid of the lantern on board examined the two guns and two pistols he had brought along. The two guns were both double-barreled affairs and in good condition. Of the pistols one was an old muzzle-loader and the other a six-shooter of modern pattern using cartridges, of which Runnell had a box.

"If they attempt any shooting we can take a hand ourselves," said the old hunter, after all of the weapons had been put into condition for immediate use. "Now I'll put out the lantern, so they won't see us coming." And thereupon the light was extinguished, leaving them in almost total darkness.

It was fortunate for the boys and old Runnell that they knew the lake shore thoroughly, otherwise they might have smashed the *Sprite* on more than one rock. Even as it was they grazed one rock in a fashion that made the hair of some of the lads rise on end.

"I thought we had struck that time!" gasped Paul, when the scare was over. "And I don't want to hurt my uncle's boat either."

"Better stand out into the lake a little further,"

suggested Fred. "There is no sense in taking such chances;" and then the course of the sloop was slightly changed.

Presently they saw a gleam of light coming down the lake and heard the sounds of paddle-wheels.

"It's the *Rocket,*" said Harry, mentioning the name of a small steamer usually used on the lake for the carrying of freight and coal. "It must be making an extra trip."

As the *Rocket* came closer there was a cry from her forward deck, and a lantern was swung vigorously as a signal for the other craft to lay-to. Then the steamer made a circle and came alongside of the sloop.

"What vessel is that?" was the question put.

"The sloop *Sprite,* from Lakeport, Captain Ankers," answered Paul.

"Oh, is that so! Heard anything of those rascals who abducted little Miss Corsen?"

"Yes."

"You have!" came in another voice—that of Munroe Corsen. "What do you know? Tell me quickly!" And there was a world of anxiety in his tones.

"We have tracked the two men who took her away," answered Joe. "They were on a motor boat, and the last we saw of them they were up in the

cove back of Stub-Rock Point." And then he and the others told of what had occurred and how they had enlisted Joel Runnell to continue the hunt.

"You did not see my daughter—or hear her?" questioned Munroe Corsen.

"No, sir," answered Harry. "But they were the men who took her away. They answered Nellie Davis's description perfectly."

"We must go after them, captain, and at once," went on the rich gentleman, to the master of the steamboat.

"Certainly—anywhere you say," returned Captain Ankers.

"You know the spot?"

"Oh, yes."

"Can you give us a tow?" asked Paul. "We can keep the sails up, so you won't have to do much hauling."

"All right—throw us your line."

The rope was gotten out, fastened to the bow of the *Sprite,* and the loose end hurled on board the *Rocket* and tied to the stern. Then off went the steamboat, the sloop following in fine style. The rope stood the strain well, for it was new and of good size.

"I don't believe they'll get away from us now," was Bart's comment.

"Let us trust not," added Harry, gravely.

In less than a quarter of an hour they made out the cove just ahead, and the sails on the sloop were lowered. The boys had learned that Mr. Corsen had chartered the *Rocket* for the purpose of locating the evildoers and had on board several officers of the law. He had been on his way home when the abduction occurred and arrived a short while after the boys left Lakeport.

It was decided that while some of those on board the steamer and the sloop remained where they were, others should go ashore, on either side of the cove, and make their way to the creek and up that stream. The creek was only a small affair and Joel Runnell, who had often fished along it, said a motor boat could not follow it more than a quarter of a mile from the cove.

"It's full of rocks up there," said the old hunter. "They'd get a hole stove in the bottom sure."

Soon the party to go ashore was ready. Each was accompanied by an officer of the law. With the boys went Joel Runnell. Paul kept in charge of the sloop, and with him remained Teddy Dugan, Walter, and Link.

"Good luck to you, Joe," said Paul, as the parties separated. "Now be careful and don't get shot."

And those were the last words spoken on either side. At a low whistle from one of the officers the parties on land began the movement up the creek, with eyes and ears on the alert for anybody who might show himself.

CHAPTER XXIII

DAYS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

"I ONLY hope they haven't hurt Violet," whispered Harry to his brother. "If any harm has befallen her the Corsens will be heartbroken."

"Hush!" whispered Joe. "We don't want those rascals to know we are approaching."

After that scarcely a word was spoken. The advance along the creek was made slowly, so that if those in the motor boat were in hiding under some bushes, which were thick in that vicinity, they would not be passed unobserved. Thus a full quarter of a mile was covered.

"Where's the motor boat?" asked one of the officers. "I don't see a thing in the creek but rocks and brushwood."

"It was certainly here," said Joe. "Can they have run away?"

A call came from the other side of the waterway at this juncture, asking if the motor boat was over there. Then a lantern was lit and flashed around in all directions.

"Gone!" burst from Fred. "They must have run away as soon as we got out of sight."

"It would be the wise thing for them to do," said Munroe Corsen. "They would know you would come back after them. I wish you had remained on guard outside of the cove. You might have kept out of range of their shotguns."

"Yes, we ought to have done that," answered Joe. "But all we thought of was to get help and rescue Violet as soon as possible."

While the talk was going on some of the party ran up the creek a short distance further. The wet ground was carefully examined, but no trace of the motor boat or footsteps could be located. Then all walked down to the mouth of the stream. Here were numerous marks, showing how the motor boat had been poled along.

"That's just what they did," said Joe, bitterly. "Waited until we were out of sight and then got out as quickly as they could."

"And the worst of it is, we don't know what direction they took," added Matt.

Mr. Corsen was very much disappointed, and all that the others could say did not cheer him up. He wanted to go after his daughter at once, but did not know which way to turn.

It was finally decided that the *Rocket* should

search the shore north of the cove while the *Sprite* should sail in the opposite direction. If those on the sloop could learn nothing they were to land Joel Runnell near his home and then take the boat to Lakeport.

"We made a mess of it, no use of talking," was Paul's dismal comment. "I am sorry we didn't hang around and risk a shot."

"Yes, or dash in and try to overcome them," added Joe. "There were enough of us to get the best of them somehow."

"Well, there is no use of crying over spilt milk," said Bart, soberly. "All we can do is to continue to hunt for that motor boat, during our leisure time."

It was four o'clock in the morning when the boys got home, tired out and much downcast. Harry and Joe lost no time in reaching the Westmore homestead. They learned that their father was still on the hunt. Mrs. Westmore and the girls were much worried and listened with interest to what the youths had to tell.

"Poor Violet!" murmured Mrs. Westmore. "I pity her from the bottom of my heart. If Laura or Bessie were kidnapped I do not know what I should do." And she shuddered.

The boys were utterly worn out, yet it was some

time before either could get to sleep. Mrs. Westmore let them lie abed until noon, and saved dinner for them. When they arose both felt as bright and fresh as ever.

Sunday passed and nobody saw or heard anything more of the motor boat, the masked men, or Violet. Mrs. Corsen was utterly prostrated. She took to her bed and a doctor came to see her three times daily. She was a very nervous lady, and it was feared that the great mental strain might cause her mind to give way.

In the mail on Monday afternoon, Munroe Corsen received a letter which interested him greatly. It told him that his daughter was well and in a city a good many miles from Lakeport. The letter stated that the writer would soon let Mr. Corsen hear from him again. The communication had been written on a typewriter and was not signed.

What to make of this the rich man did not know. He showed it to his friends and the police. The letter had been posted at a town called Wellford, about fifty miles from Lakeport, but the postal authorities there could not tell who had mailed it.

"This is certainly a mystery," said Joe to his brother. "But it is good to know Violet is well."

"Providing you can believe the writer," said Harry. "A man who will kidnap a girl will do almost anything. Do you know what I think?"

"Well?"

"That letter was written to throw the authorities off the scent. She may not be in any city, but right around here."

"That's true, too," came from Fred, who was present. "I don't believe in giving up the hunt around here."

Munroe Corsen had already offered a reward of one hundred dollars to anybody who could bring him information leading to the rescue of Violet and now he increased the reward to one thousand dollars. This caused a great number of men and boys to go in search of the missing girl, and every motor boat found on the lake was put under temporary suspicion. But nothing came of this; and at last the excitement, so far as the general public was concerned, subsided. The newspapers had given the affair great prominence in their columns, but now came a labor strike in a near-by factory town and then a big city fire, and the press turned its attention to these newer happenings.

"It's too bad, but I don't see what we can do more," said Fred one day to Paul. "We've hunted high and low and nothing seems to turn up."

"Here is a letter I received to-day," answered Paul. "I rather think it will interest the club members."

The communication was from some young men living at a summer resort on the other side of the lake. The young men had a new sloop, called the *Firefly*, about the same size and make-up as the *Sprite*. They wished to find out which craft was the better of the two and so asked that a race be arranged, to take place some time during the next week. They suggested that the course might be in the shape of a triangle, placed on the day of the race according to the wind, and that the prize might be in the shape of a supper at the Brookside Hotel, paid for by the side losing the race.

"Why, that's all right, Paul!" cried Fred. "I'd like to help sail the *Sprite*. I see they say each sloop might carry a crew of seven."

"I wanted to act fair in this matter," went on Paul. "If the race comes off I'd like to give all the boat club members a chance to be in it."

"But you can carry only seven—or as many as they want to carry."

"I was going to suggest that each boat carry fourteen people, men or boys, no children. Then we can all go and all participate in the dinner."

"Good! that suits me. The dinner ought not

to cost more than a dollar a head, so if we lose we'll each have to pay only two dollars."

The matter was discussed at the boathouse, and it was decided to see the owners of the *Firefly* without delay. The meeting took place the next day, and it was then decided that each sloop was to carry fifteen people, including several ladies if desired. A dinner for thirty was ordered at the Brookside Hotel, and the side losing the race was to foot the bill.

Paul's uncle was as enthusiastic as anybody over the race, for he had always considered his craft one of the best on Pine Lake. He decided to go with the boys, but it was understood that they should work the boat themselves, under his directions. Then the sloop was hauled out of the water, carefully scraped, and given a good coating of black lead. After that the sails were carefully inspected and several new ropes and blocks were supplied, and the hinges to the rudder were carefully oiled.

The boys hoped for a good breeze on the day of the race and they were not disappointed. The wind came from the west and the triangular course on Pine Lake was laid out accordingly by the judges, of whom there were three.

"There is no use in talking," said Matt, as he came on board the *Sprite*. "That *Firefly* is cer-

tainly a fine boat. I saw her up the lake yesterday and she shot along in great shape."

"So is the *Sprite* a fine boat," added Paul, confidently.

"Oh, I know that, Paul. Only don't think you are going to have a walkover. They are going to push us hard for first place."

"Well, that is what makes a race exciting," said Mr. Shale, with a faint smile.

A great many folks living along the lake had heard about the race and a goodly crowd gathered to see the contest. Many boats were out, some showing a brave display of flags and bunting. Si Voup and Ike Boardman were not present, and their motor boat was locked up.

"They feel sore because they can't get into any races," said Harry, and he was right. The club organized by Si and Ike had proven a flat failure and was on the point of disbanding for lack of interest.

The *Firefly* with her crew was on time, her new white sails showing up well in the sunshine. They had been carefully moistened, to hold every bit of air, and the sails on the *Sprite* had also been wetted down.

A small cannon had been provided by Mr. Rush for the occasion, and at the proper moment this

was discharged, and both sloops crossed the starting line at exactly the same instant. Every sail had been set with the greatest of care, and the showing the two crafts made was truly beautiful.

"Hurrah for the *Sprite!*" was the cry from the Lakeport supporters.

"Hurrah for the *Firefly!*" came the answering rally. "She is sure to win!"

Then came a tooting of horns and a blowing of whistles. The girls on shore and on the other boats waved their flags and handkerchiefs, and some shouted as loudly as did the boys and men. It was the first sloop race the lake had seen for some time, and the interest was intense all around.

In a small boathouse up the lake shore sat Si Voup and Ike Boardman, each with a scowl on his face. They kept behind a thin lace curtain at one of the windows, so that they might not be seen and recognized by any one passing on the water.

"I hope they lose," growled Si. "I hope the *Firefly* fellows lick 'em out of their boots!" And he fairly gritted his teeth in his anger.

"I'd give ten dollars to see the *Sprite* come in behind," added Ike. "If only we had been able to get at that boat before the race——"

"Couldn't do it—they watched her too closely,

Ike. Didn't I try it twice? But never mind. Wait till those shell races come off with Brookside. We'll fix their shells then, eh?"

"Indeed we will. They shall never win those races—not if I know it," answered Ike Boardman, emphatically.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RACE BETWEEN THE TWO SLOOPS

"EASE her off just a little, Paul. There is no use in straining her on this leg of the race."

It was Mr. Shale who spoke, after carefully inspecting the sails and the mast of the *Sprite*. The breeze was freshening and the owner of the sloop did not wish to run the risk of losing his stick.

The two boats were rushing along side by side. At the start it had looked as if the *Firefly* had an advantage, but by skillful maneuvering the *Sprite* had come abreast of her rival, and thus the boats moved through the clear waters of Pine Lake until the turning-point of the first leg, as it was called, of the race,—that is, the end of one side of the triangle,—was gained. Here there was considerable "jockeying," but the *Firefly's* skipper managed to get inside and thus gained two lengths as the boats started on the second leg.

"I don't like this," said Joe. "We may have hard work to make up those two lengths."

"We'll do better on this second leg—the wind

is just about as we want it," answered Bart, who took a deep interest in sailing. "Just you wait and see."

A wild cheering from the *Firefly* supporters had followed the rounding of the first stakeboat, but this died away as it was presently seen that the *Sprite* was slowly but surely closing the gap between the two craft.

"The *Sprite* is coming up!"

"Just see how she cuts the water! Isn't she a dandy?"

"Yes, but the *Firefly* is sailing some, let me tell you!"

Just before the end of the second leg was reached the wind appeared to die away utterly. The sails flapped dismally against the masts, and all of the racers were chagrined. Paul looked at his uncle.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"Stand by to trim the mainsail," sang out Mr. Shale. "We may have more wind than we want presently. It is shifting, that's all."

What the owner of the sloop said was true. The wind was veering, and soon it blew freshly from another point of the compass. The rudder was thrown over quickly, and a moment later the *Sprite* came up to the second stakeboat. She had caught the new breeze quicker than the *Firefly*, and she

rounded the turning point twelve seconds before her rival.

"Hurrah! The *Sprite* got in first that time!"

"My, but didn't Paul Shale bring her around slick!"

"Here they come on the home stretch!"

So the cries ran on. In the meantime those on both craft were watching the wind, which was getting stronger every moment.

"We can stand it so far," said Mr. Shale. "But stand by to take in sail as soon as I advise it."

"They are getting ready to take in sail on the *Firefly*," said Fred, after a study of the rival boat.

"Yes, but they haven't taken in anything yet," answered Joe.

"They have taken down the topsail," said Fred, a few seconds later. "How about our own?"

"Not yet," answered Mr. Shale. "The stick is pretty strong."

On and on rushed the two sloops before a wind that was increasing rapidly. Looking behind, the boys on the *Sprite* could see the whitecaps forming on the water. The *Sprite* was now two full lengths ahead of the *Firefly*. The waves were dashing over the bow in a style to cover all on board with a fine spray.

SHE ROUNDED THE TURNING POINT TWELVE SECONDS BEFORE HER RIVAL. — *Page 222.*

"The topsail will have to come down now," said Mr. Shale, as the sloop careened to one side, and down it came in first-class nautical style, for the boys had learned to do the work with neatness and dispatch. Those on the *Firefly* were reefing the mainsail, but Mr. Shale told those with him to let the big sheet alone for a few seconds more.

With the wind fairly whistling around them, the boys on the *Sprite* saw the *Firefly* fall further and further behind. Those on the outside boats and on the lake shore were cheering wildly for Lakeport, but the rush of wind cut off the sound. There was still half a mile to the finish and it looked as if Lakeport would win.

"I thought we'd do it!" cried Matt, and began to dance a jig on the deck.

"Don't crow until the race is over," said Link.

"Oh, we've got it," put in Frank.

"The wind is dying down!" called out Harry. "Or else it is shifting around again."

"It is shifting, but we can't wait for that," said Mr. Shale. "Up with the topsail again." And the little sail went up in a jiffy. All sails were again out to their fullest on the *Firefly,* and now the boat from the other side of the lake began to crawl closer once more.

"She's coming up!"

"Oh, just look at that!" groaned Matt. "I thought sure we had it!"

"And I told you not to crow," answered Link.

With anxious hearts the boys watched the approach of the *Firefly*. The new boat was assuredly doing very well and the boys were handling her to perfection.

Only a hundred yards were still to be covered by the *Sprite* and she still held a lead of three lengths. Paul was handling the tiller as best he could, with his uncle giving all the directions necessary. Joe and his chums could do nothing more and waited the outcome of the race with their hearts, figuratively speaking, in their throats.

"Oh, if we could only help push!" cried Fred, in an agony of spirits.

"Or get out and pull," suggested Bart.

They had now but fifty yards to go and the bow of the *Firefly* was within a few yards of the *Sprite's* stern. But now an extra puff of wind came up and the Lakeport sloop made an extra bound forward. Straight for the line she rushed, with her rival at her heels.

"The *Sprite!* The *Sprite!*" was the cry, and amid a wild cheering, and tooting of horns, and the blowing of whistles, the *Sprite* came over the line—the winner of the race by a full length.

"We win! We win!" cried Joe, and threw his cap in the air. "Three cheers for Paul Shale and the *Sprite!*" And the cheers were given with a will.

"Say, but this is great!" yelled Matt. "I can't hold myself in!" And he began to dance. Then he attempted to throw a handspring, lost his balance, and slid overboard with a loud splash!

"Matt's overboard!"

"Stop the sloop, or he may be drowned!"

"What a thing to do!" cried Harry. "Wait, I'll throw him a rope."

"They are picking him up from the *Firefly,*" said Bart, looking back. He was right, and a minute later Matt was safe on the deck of the rival sloop.

"Sa—sa—say!" he spluttered, when he could speak. "Di—did you ever see such a fool!"

"What's the matter?" asked the owner of the *Firefly,* dryly. "Did you come back to tell us we had lost?"

"N—no, I came ba—back to tell you I wanted a drink and went overboard for it," answered Matt. And then he had to laugh in spite of his wet clothing.

Of course the owner of the *Firefly* was chagrined over the outcome of the race. But he was a gentleman and took his defeat in good part.

Shortly after the race the two sloops came together, and both parties shook hands all around, while Matt slipped into the cuddy of the *Sprite,* to put on some dry clothing.

"I do not think you have any cause to complain," said Mr. Shale, to Luke Lockwood, the owner of the *Firefly.* "Your boat is a new one, and when you get used to her you will be able to make her do much better."

"I know that," answered Luke Lockwood. "Some of the ropes do not work as they should, and the handling of the tiller bothered me a little. We missed it coming around that second stakeboat, too. I thought I could come around first, but Paul was too sharp for me. However, it was a square race and I am not going to complain."

It was arranged that the dinner at the Brookside Hotel—a summer resort famous in that locality for its dinners—should be a gala occasion. Besides the boys ten grown folk, including six ladies, joined in the feast, the outsiders of course paying their own bill. The dinner came off that evening at seven o'clock and lasted until half-past eight, after which there were several speeches, including one by Paul and another by Luke Lockwood, who proved to be a fine fellow and quite funny in his remarks. The gathering did not break up until ten

o'clock, and the Lakeport lads went home feeling that they had had a day never to be forgotten.

On the following morning the boat club members went into training for the races with the Brookside Boat Club. Rockley White was on hand, to congratulate them on the success of the sloop race.

"If you'll row as well as you sailed the sloop I shall have nothing to complain of," said the coach.

He made them go out both in the four-oared shell and in the eight-oared craft and kept them rowing until they were all but fagged out. His keen eyes were everywhere, and it was "Number Two, hold your hands over more," "Number Three, bend your back less," "Steady, Stroke, or you'll throw the others out," constantly. He was certainly very thorough, and they felt if they lost any of the coming races it would not be because he had not given them all the instructions necessary.

When Joe and Harry came home that evening they found that Laura, who had been up to the Corsen house, to learn how Mrs. Corsen was getting along, had brought news of importance.

"Mr. Corsen has received another letter from the men who kidnapped Violet," said she. "And what do you think they want?"

"Money, I suppose," answered her big brother.

"They want twenty thousand dollars, Joe!"

"Twenty thousand dollars!" cried Joe and Harry in a breath.

"Why, that is a fortune!" added Mrs. Westmore.

"Supposing Mr. Corsen can't pay that amount?" said Harry.

"Then they say they will send Violet to a ship bound for South America and she will never come home."

"Oh, what rascals!" murmured Harry. "I wish I could lay my hands on them!"

A little later Fred came over and was told the news. The stout youth was greatly astonished.

"Why, that is strange!" he cried.

"It's dastardly," answered Joe.

"But you don't know what I mean, Joe," answered the stout youth. "I was thinking of the twenty thousand dollars."

"What of that?"

"Some time ago I was at father's store and Mr. Corsen came in and sat down to talk. While he was talking he spoke about his interest in the oilcloth business. He has had a lot of trouble with some men and they want him to get out of the company, or something like that. They offered him two thousand dollars."

"What has that got to do with this twenty thousand dollars?" asked Harry.

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps a good deal. Mr. Corsen told father he wouldn't sell for two thousand dollars,—that he had asked the men twenty thousand dollars."

"The same amount!" exclaimed Joe. He drew a sudden breath. "You don't think, Fred——"

"That the same crowd kidnapped Violet," finished Harry.

"I don't know what to think," answered the stout youth. "But it is strange, isn't it, that when Mr. Corsen demands twenty thousand dollars for his share in the business immediately afterwards his daughter is stolen from home and the kidnappers ask twenty thousand dollars to return her?"

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE SINGLE-SHELLS

"FRED, if I were you I'd go and see Mr. Corsen about this!" said Harry, after the matter had been discussed for several minutes.

"I doubt if it will do any good," said Joe. "Mr. Corsen must have thought of this himself."

"Well, it won't do any harm."

"I'll go up at once," said Fred, and a minute later started for the Corsen mansion. He found the gates to the grounds closed, and the man-of-all-work told him that the family wished to see nobody, because the lady of the house was so ill.

"Please tell Mr. Corsen I wish to see him only a moment," said Fred. "I want to tell him something."

The man went off, and presently the rich gentleman came out on the veranda and beckoned to the stout youth.

"We have been so bothered with reporters, and private detectives looking for jobs, that I have had to turn folks away," said Munroe Corsen. "I am

very willing to listen to anything you have to say, Fred."

"Perhaps it doesn't amount to a great deal," answered the boy. Then he related what he had heard and his suspicions.

"Yes, I have thought of that, but I cannot see how the two affairs can be connected. At the time Violet was kidnapped the two men with whom I am dealing in the oilcloth matter were in the city, miles away from here. Besides, they are both very small men, slightly built, and not at all like the two men who did the foul deed."

"But the chaps who ran off with Violet may be confederates of theirs," insisted the boy.

"Possibly."

"Why don't you have the oilcloth men shadowed, as the police call it? You might possibly learn something."

"I can do that—and I will," added Munroe Corsen. "But I cannot believe that those business men would be so wicked."

"Well, my father says you can't realize how wicked some folks can be," answered Fred. "I certainly would have them watched night and day."

"I have got to be very careful in what I do," continued Munroe Corsen. "If I go too far those

rascals who abducted Violet may do her harm, or even put her out of the way." And he shuddered.

After that interview another hunt was made along the lake, but nothing came of it. The kidnappers had wanted the twenty thousand dollars inside of ten days. It was to be left at a certain spot on a lonely road. Instead of sending the money Mr. Corsen sent a letter, saying he could not raise the money just then, but would try to do so inside of the next two or three weeks. He begged that Violet might not be harmed. A reply came back that the kidnappers would wait three weeks, but not a day longer. The authorities tried to learn who got the letter left on the lonely road, but the communication was taken away during the night and when there was a heavy rainstorm, and nobody could tell how it was done.

"I guess this is a case for the trained detectives to fathom," was Walter's comment. "We can do nothing." And a number of the other boat club members agreed with him.

The time was now close at hand for the single-shell race with the Brookside Boat Club, and it was decided by Rockley White that the three contestants on the Lakeport side should be Joe for the first race, Matt for the second, and Paul for the third.

As their opponents the Brookside club put up George Dixon, Ike Gass, and Andy Brown.

The day dawned darkly and all of the boys were afraid it would rain. There was a sharp wind down the lake and the whitecaps could be seen in all directions.

"There won't be any race to-day," said Harry, as he looked out of the window of the bedroom.

"Oh, it may break away by noon," answered Joe, and his surmise was correct. The sun came out by eleven o'clock and shortly after dinner the wind went down, leaving the surface of Pine Lake almost as smooth as could be desired.

Joe was in prime condition and all of his friends fully expected him to win. But George Dixon was known to be both strong and a good oarsman; so the contest was likely to be spirited from start to finish.

"Be careful not to row too fast at the start," said Rockley White, as Joe stepped into his shell, a perfect beauty of a racer. "And mind what I told you about not dipping deeply enough. That is your one fault."

George Dixon was already at the starting point, and both boys received a rousing cheer as they lined up for the contest. At the crack of the pistol they were off.

The course was a mile straight, and for nearly one-third of the distance the two shells kept side by side, each rower bending in unison with the other. Joe was afraid to let himself out for fear of getting winded, and George Dixon was afraid of the same thing. But gradually the oarsman from Brookside increased the stroke from thirty to thirty-two and Joe followed suit.

"Just see them go! That's rowing for you!"

"Each pulls a perfect stroke."

"George Dixon is ahead by two yards!"

"Yes, but Joe Westmore is crawling up again."

Joe had missed one stroke—his oars not cutting the water as deeply as was desirable—the very fault Rockley White had warned him against. But then the youth set his teeth hard and jumped his stroke two higher to the minute. Up and up he came, until the two shells were once more bow and bow. At this his friends cheered madly.

"That's the style, Joe! Keep it up! You're bound to win!"

"Pull, George, pull! Don't let him pass you! Show him what wind you have left!"

Both lads heard the cries and each tried to increase the stroke. With George Dixon this was impossible, but Joe pulled just a trifle more rapidly and slowly he went ahead, one, two, three yards,

and then a full length. His friends yelled themselves hoarse and in the midst of this tumult he crossed the line,—a winner by a length and a half.

"Oh, Joe, that was grand!" cried Harry, as soon as he could reach his brother. "I never saw anybody row better."

"You assuredly did remarkably well," was Mr. White's comment. "I am proud of you."

Of course George Dixon was disappointed, but he had been beaten fairly, so he could not complain.

"Anyway, it's only one race out of three," said one of the Brookside supporters. "Maybe we'll win the other two, and that will give us this series."

Not long after this the second race was started, between Matt for Lakeport and Ike Gass for Brookside. Ike Gass was a wiry fellow with splendid muscles and good lung power. He took the lead almost from the start, and although Matt rowed well he could not overtake his opponent, and Brookside took the second race by a little over two lengths. At this the boys from up the lake shouted and cheered with all their strength, and nobody could blame them.

"Never mind, Matt," said Mr. White, when the young oarsman came back much disgusted. "You did very well. Why, your time was only six seconds less than that of George Dixon. That Ike

Gass is a splendid rower, that's all. It's no disgrace to be beaten by such a fellow."

"Well, I certainly did all I could," answered Matt. "Once a mosquito or fly got in my mouth and that bothered me a little. But I am not going to say the race wasn't fair on that account," he added, hastily.

When the third race was called Mr. White gave Paul some minute instructions about what to do. The young oarsman was inclined to get nervous and the coach warned him to keep his wits about him.

"Don't let the other fellow worry you," he said. "Keep right at your rowing and remember not to let yourself out too much at the start, but pull for all you are worth on the last third."

At the crack of the pistol the two shells dashed off. But before a dozen strokes were taken Paul made a miss, covering himself with spray. By this he lost a full length, and a yell of derision went up from some outsiders.

"Just look at that! He doesn't know how to row!"

"Why didn't they put up some chap like that first fellow?"

"They'll lose this race sure!"

So the comments ran on, while the Lakeport club members groaned in spirit.

"I can't understand it," said Joe. "Paul is usually very careful."

"He's excited—he may go all to pieces," replied Bart. "Too bad! I wanted him to win this—it means the series to us."

For one brief instant after he made the miss-stroke Paul's heart deserted him. He saw the shell of his rival shoot ahead, and heard the cries of derision from the shore and the neighboring craft. Then his grit returned and his teeth shut with a snap, while his face took on a look of grim determination.

"I've got to win!" he thought. "I've simply got to do it—and I will—I will—*I will!*"

He bent to his oars, and the very next stroke seemed fairly to lift the shell from the water. But his rival was ahead, and meant to keep his lead if possible. Like two machines the bodies of the rowers rose and fell. The stroke was increased, and then increased again, and still the Brookside craft was in front.

"Pull, Paul!"

"Pull, Andy! You've got him beaten already."

Paul did not hear the cries. He was intent upon but one thing—to overtake the other shell and pass it. Again he increased the stroke, although it made

his heart beat like a trip-hammer to do it. Then slowly he came up, inch by inch, until the two shells were bow and bow. A cheer followed, and this was increased when his shell went ahead half a length and then a full length.

"Whoop her up, Andy! Put in your big licks!"

"Now you are doing it, Paul! Keep it up to the finish and you'll be all right!"

The oarsman from Brookside endeavored to increase his stroke, but it was impossible. Paul, however, desired to "make up" for his bad showing at the start, and with a vigor that was truly astonishing he sent his craft on and on, until he was two lengths ahead. Then, just before the finishing line was gained, the Brookside oarsman had to give up the terrific pace, and Paul came in a winner by three lengths and a half.

"Hurrah for Paul Shale!"

"Say, that was great rowing, wasn't it?"

"Do you know his time was better by three seconds than the time of any of the others?"

"He made a bad break at the start, but he more than made up for it at the finish."

"Two out of three! Lakeport takes the first series of races!"

And so the talking and shouting went on, while

Paul was taken ashore, surrounded and congratulated. The fact that they had won the first series of races filled the boys of Lakeport with glee, and the celebration at the clubhouse that night was a glorious one.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN CAMP ON PINE ISLAND

Two days after the races recorded in the last chapter Harry was sent to Link Darrow's home, to get Mr. Darrow to do a job of carpentering at the Westmore place.

When Harry arrived he was told that the carpenter was in the shop a short distance away. As he approached the building he heard loud talking, and saw that Mr. Darrow was having a quarrel with a tall, thin-faced man, wearing long, tangled hair and a rusty suit of black.

"I want damages and I intend to get them!" stormed the stranger. "I am not going to wait another day."

"Mr. Power, I am sorry," answered the carpenter. "But I can't return the model if it is not to be found."

"Then you'll have to pay what I demand."

"But I can't pay any such sum. I am comparatively a poor man."

"You have ruined me!" groaned Mr. Power,

who was an inventor, and one with rather wild and extravagant ideas. "I expected to make a fortune out of that thing."

"We might make another model," suggested Mr. Darrow. "I said I'd do that before——"

"It won't do! I want that model back, or I'll sue you and put you in the poorhouse!" And having thus delivered himself Mr. Power stalked away from the carpenter shop and up the street. He was erratic at all times and the loss of the model had all but driven him crazy.

"I suppose he wanted that model that was lost from the sloop during the storm," said Harry.

"Yes, he is just about crazy over it," answered the carpenter, in a despondent tone.

"Was it really so valuable, Mr. Darrow?"

"He says it was. I don't know much about such things. I wish I could get the model back."

"Link said last week you were trying some experiment with bits of wood."

"Yes, we went out and threw some squares of wood into the lake, each with a small mast and a white rag attached. The wind was blowing as it blew during that storm. We thought we might find out by the squares how the model drifted."

"Have you found out anything yet?"

"No. Link is going out this afternoon and to-

morrow and look around. I can't afford the time—so long as I can get work to do."

"I think I'll go with Link—if he wants me—and I'll get some of the other boys to go, too," said Harry.

He was as good as his word, and the next day a party of seven was made up, and it was settled to stay out two or three days, weather permitting. The boys were to hunt along the lake shore and also along the shores of Pine Island. They were to camp out on shore over night, or remain on their boat, just as they pleased.

"Say, this is like a touch of old times!" cried Joe, when all were on board the *Sprite,* Mr. Shale having loaned them the sloop for the occasion. "Don't you remember how we camped out at Two-Tree Lodge?"

"And the fun we had playing Indians," put in Harry.

"And the fine hunting and fishing," added Fred.

"Yes, and the time we went out and found the *Sprite* after she had been stolen," went on Joe. "We certainly had great times."

"And how we were left on Pine Island without a boat, when we wanted to play that great game of baseball," said Fred. "But we got the best of Si Voup and Ike Boardman, didn't we?"

"Wonder where Si and Ike are now?" put in Matt. "I haven't seen either of them for a week."

"Both on a vacation at Casco Bay, so I was told," answered Link. "I don't think any of us will miss them."

"No, they can stay away for good," returned Harry.

Out in the middle of the lake all of the boys, and especially Link, looked around eagerly for some trace of the bits of board which had been thrown out to float. All during that afternoon the boys remained on the watch, but not a trace of the squares could be found anywhere.

"Well, that proves one thing," said Link. "As they couldn't very well sink, they must have floated to somewhere. Now if we can find out where, we'll perhaps get close to where the model is."

"That's good reasoning as far as it goes," said Matt. "But you must remember one thing, after the storm the wind shifted, and it may have blown the model in some other direction. However, I think the plan a good one to follow up," he added, not to discourage the carpenter's son too much.

When darkness came on, and the boys had made no discovery of importance, they resolved to sail over to the lower end of Pine Island and go into camp at a nook well known to all of them. They

tied up at an overhanging tree, and with a hatchet cut some brushwood and big sticks, and soon had a roaring blaze going. They had brought with them two big baskets of provisions and also some ground coffee, some sugar, and some condensed milk.

"I am going to try my luck at fishing," declared Joe, and had a line out in a jiffy, he having brought bait with him. Several of the others also tried their luck, and managed to catch several lake bass of fair size and also some perch and several suckers. They had a frying pan with them, and in this cooked some of the fish, keeping the rest for breakfast. They also made a good pot of coffee, and then gathered around to enjoy a meal "fit for a President," as Harry declared.

Sitting around the fire was very pleasant, and for over two hours the boys talked of the good times they had had in the past, when camping in the snow on the island, and when playing the numerous ball games the summer previous.

"I believe it is warm enough to sleep right out in the open," declared Joe. "It is going to be a beautiful night."

"Do you think any of us ought to remain on guard?" questioned Bart.

"Perhaps it might be better," said Matt. "We don't want anybody to run off with the *Sprite,* or

any wild animals to chew us up while we are sleeping."

"If an animal chews me up I reckon I'll wake up and protest," said Joe, dryly.

"Well, you know there are animals around, Joe—wolves, and foxes, and maybe a bear."

"Yes, and I am willing we take turns at standing guard. Each fellow can stay up about an hour and a quarter. That will see us through the night nicely."

So it was arranged, and, straws being drawn, it fell to Link to go on watch first, with Harry following. Harry said he wouldn't turn in until after he had stood guard, for he didn't feel like getting up after sleeping only an hour or so.

"As you please," said Joe; and then he and the rest fixed themselves couches as best they could and turned in, leaving Harry and Link to watch and to keep the fire going.

An hour and a half later Harry found himself the only one awake, the carpenter's son having gone to rest as soon as his time was up. The boy noticed that the fire was rather low, and he took the hatchet, intending to cut some more sticks with which to replenish it. He did not wish to disturb the others by the sounds of chopping and so walked away from the fire a distance of a hundred feet or more.

The lad had just cut one stick and was reaching for another when, happening to glance through the trees, he saw the form of a man, standing motionless, watching him. The fellow was dressed in a dark suit and wore a slouch hat.

Harry was so startled at the unexpected appearance that for the instant he knew not what to say.

"What—who are you?" he stammered finally, but the man did not answer. Instead he backed away several paces.

"I say, who are you? What do you want here?" went on Harry, and held the hatchet tightly, for possible use as a weapon.

But the man spoke not a word; instead he continued to back away, doing it as silently as a ghost. Harry watched him until some bushes hid the stranger from view.

"Come back here!" called out the boy. "I want to talk to you!"

Still there was no answer. Harry strained his ears, but not even the crackling of a twig came to him. He was so disturbed he knew not what to do next.

"Harry!" It was Joe's voice calling, from the near side of the campfire. "Did you say anything?" And the elder brother raised himself on his elbow.

"Yes, I did, Joe. I just saw somebody in the bushes over yonder," was the reply, and Harry walked towards the fire.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know, except that it was a big man. I called to him, but he backed away without saying a word."

"That's queer," murmured the elder youth. "It couldn't have been one of the crowd playing a trick on you?"

"No, they are all here," and Harry made a hasty count.

By this time some of the other boys had roused up and all wanted to know what had happened. In a few minutes everybody was wide awake and had heard what Harry had to relate.

"This is certainly queer," was Matt's comment. "Maybe the fellow was only a tramp."

"Then why didn't he answer when I called to him?"

"Perhaps he was afraid," suggested Paul.

"Why should he be afraid if he wasn't up to some wrong-doing?" asked Bart. "Boys, I don't like this."

"Sure you weren't dreaming, Harry?" queried Link. "You were pretty sleepy when I turned in."

"No, I wasn't dreaming," answered Harry

stoutly. "I had just cut this stick and was going to cut another when I saw the man watching me."

"Did he have a gun, or anything like that?" asked Matt, and his tone was a trifle nervous.

"I didn't see any gun. His hands were behind him."

"I move we go on a hunt for the fellow," suggested Joe. "We can take sticks and torches. If the fellow is up to no good we want to know it."

After a short discussion Joe's plan was agreed to, although some of the lads would have preferred to wait until daylight before beginning a search. But nobody wanted to appear like a coward, and each got a stout club and a torch, and then the hunt for the mysterious individual commenced.

The hunt lasted for the best part of an hour, but was of no avail. At one spot, where the ground was soft, they saw the marks of fresh footprints of good size, and this confirmed Harry's story that the man had really been in that vicinity. But the footprints could not be followed on account of the rocks and brushwood.

"He got out, and in a hurry, too," said Link. "By this time he may be a mile or more away. I move we go back to camp," and this was done, and some time later all turned in but the boy to stand

guard after Harry. This was Bart, and he was followed by Matt.

It was early in the morning when Matt stirred up the fire and took a walk to the water's edge to make certain nothing had happened to the *Sprite*. The sloop was exactly as they had left her, and he turned back and circled the campfire and the sleepers around it. Then he sat down on a big rock to wait.

He had been sitting there for ten minutes when he suddenly leaped to his feet. What was that sound he had heard? Was it the cry of a wild beast, or was it the piercing scream of some human being? He listened and a moment later the sound was repeated.

"Somebody crying for help!" he muttured. "Who can it be?"

CHAPTER XXVII

ABOUT THE LOST MODEL

"WHAT's the trouble, Matt?"

"Have you seen that strange man again?"

"No, I haven't seen the man," answered Matt, as one after another of the boys answered his call to wake up. "But I just heard two very piercing screams for help."

"Screams for help?" queried Harry, and at Matt's words all of the boys became deeply interested.

"Where did the screams come from?" asked Link.

"I am not exactly sure. I was so startled I didn't notice closely. But I rather think they came from along the west shore," added Matt, after a moment's thought.

"What sort of a voice was it?" questioned Bart.

"Rather high-pitched, like a woman's, or a girl's."

"Gracious, do you think it could have been Violet Corsen's voice?" burst out Joe.

"Maybe."

"They may have Violet on this island," said Harry. "Let us make a search at once."

"Yes, but we've got to be careful," spoke up one of the others. "Those fellows who ran off with her are desperate characters."

"It may not be Violet at all," said another. "Matt, are you certain it wasn't the cry of some wild animal, or a night bird?"

At this last question Matt shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think so—yet it might have been," he answered, slowly. "It all happened so quickly I was rather confused," he explained.

A faint glow in the eastern sky showed that daylight was approaching, and in a very few minutes the search along the west shore of Pine Island was begun. Fred, Harry, and Joe led the way, as they knew the island better than any of the others. They covered more than half a mile and then came to a halt. Nothing unusual had come to light.

"Let us work our way back through the woods and brushwood," suggested Link, and this was done, and they did not return to their camp until the sun was up. By this time all were tired out and hungry, and Bart suggested that they have breakfast.

"I am inclined to think that Matt heard some beast or bird," said the big youth.

"I'd think that myself," answered Harry. "But you mustn't forget the strange man I saw."

"Maybe he's a crazy fellow, and did the screaming himself," said Link.

They fried the rest of the fish and made another pot of coffee, and ate their breakfast with good relish, for there is nothing like fresh air to give one an appetite. While eating they discussed the situation, but could reach no satisfactory conclusion. They decided to make another search, and this lasted until noon.

"No use," said one of the boys, at last. "We may as well give it up."

"Let us make one more trip, along the east shore," said Joe. "It won't take but two hours at the most. If you wish, some of you can sail the *Sprite,* and we can board her up at Top Point."

It was arranged for Paul and Harry to sail the sloop up the shore, and the pair were soon on the way. The others stalked off on land, looking in all directions for some trace of the man Harry had seen, for they felt that he must be in some way connected with the strange screams which had been heard.

About half a mile from the camp they came to a small cove where Joe had once shot a fox. Here there was a sandy beach and bathing not to be

excelled. Bart suggested that they have a swim and continue the hunt afterwards.

"Yes, let us have a swim by all means," said Matt, and called to those on the *Sprite*. The mainsail of the craft was lowered and she was run in at a convenient point and anchored. Soon the lads were ready for the water, and in they dove, one after another.

"Isn't this just grand!" cried Harry, enthusiastically. "The water is as clear as crystal, and it is just cool enough to brace one up."

"Let's have a race," said Fred, and started off, the others following. They swam to a distant rock, and then to another a little further up the shore.

"Hello!" cried Joe, suddenly. "Look here!"

"What is it?" queried the others, and looked with interest as Joe held up a square bit of board with a small stick and rag attached.

"One of the bits of board father and I threw overboard," cried Link.

"Here is another," came from Matt, and he held the object up. It was well water-soaked, but had refused to sink and was bobbing up and down beside the rock.

"Link, maybe the model came this way," said Bart.

"I hope it did, and that we find it," answered the carpenter's son. "I am going on a hunt right away," he added.

The discovery of the square bits of board made the lads forgot all about the strange man and the screams which had been heard, and all set to work to see if they could find any more of the bits of board or the lost model. They went from rock to rock, and then up and down the lake shore for a quarter of a mile or more.

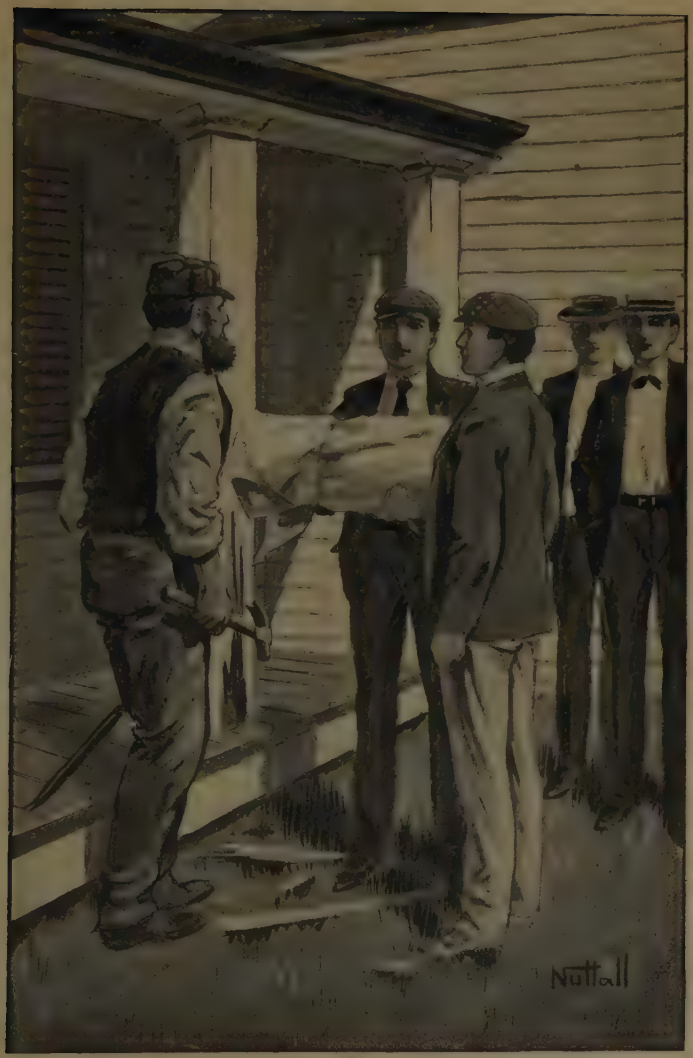
"There is something!" cried Harry, presently, and pointed to an object lying in the water under some overhanging bushes. He and Bart and Link made a rush for it, but the carpenter's son was in the lead, and pulled the object into the light.

"The model! The model!" he cried, joyously.

"Is it really?" asked some of the others, and came running or swimming to the spot. There was still a patch of black oilcloth around the affair and this Link pulled off in shreds. Yes, the model was there, the wooden portions water-soaked and the metal parts somewhat rusted.

"Well, this is luck," declared Matt. "We didn't find out where those screams came from, but we did locate this model,—and that is really what we came for."

"My father will be overjoyed," declared the



"SEE WHAT WE HAVE FOUND, FATHER!" CRIED LINK.
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carpenter's son. "I must get home at once and tell him the news."

Nobody could blame Link for his anxiety to take the glad tidings to his parent, and all swam with the model to the *Sprite*. Then they dressed, ran up the mainsail and jib, and stood away from Pine Island and in the direction of Lakeport.

"I think the best thing we can do is to report what we saw and heard last night to the police," said Harry. "Then, if they want to, they can make a hunt for that strange man."

Arriving at home, the boys found that Mr. Darrow had gone over to the Westmore homestead, to see what carpentering had to be done there. All went over in a body, Link in advance, with the model in a newspaper under his arm. They found Mr. Darrow outside, ripping away the rotted posts of a back porch.

"See what we have found, father!" cried Link, and held out the package.

"Link, did you really——" began Mr. Darrow, and his voice shook so that he could not proceed.

"Yes, it's the model," went on the son. "We found it on the shore of Pine Island, close to some of those square bits we threw overboard."

"Thank fortune, the model has come to light!" gasped Mr. Darrow, and tore the object from the

newspaper. "This will save me from a great deal of trouble and expense," he added.

He wanted to know all about it, and sitting in the shade on the lawn the boys told their story, with not only Mr. Darrow but also Mrs. Westmore, Laura, and Bessie as listeners. The carpenter was so grateful that he insisted upon thanking all the boys and declared they should lose nothing by what they had done for him.

"You've done enough already, hasn't he, fellows?" said Joe. "You fixed up the boathouse things in fine shape." For Mr. Darrow had done much work at the house without charging them for his time.

"I shall notify Mr. Power at once," said the carpenter, a little later. "I will fix up this model if he wishes it, and then settle up with him,—and that is the last I want to do with crack-brained inventors," he added. It may be mentioned here that he settled with the inventor the next week, taking half the amount that was due him, and giving Mr. Power the model just as it was. As a matter of fact the machine which the inventor was trying to get up was not very satisfactory and Mr. Power never realized out of it half the money he put into it.

As soon as Mr. Darrow went away some of the

boys, including Harry and Matt, called on the local authorities and told their story of the strange man and the screams that had been heard. The authorities promised an investigation, and two men were sent up to the island. But these men discovered nothing unusual, and there the matter was allowed to rest.

The members of the boat club had now to prepare for the four-oared shell races, and Mr. White was already busy dividing the lads into the three crews which were to compete. After numerous trials the crews were made up as follows:

FIRST CREW.

Harry Westmore, *bow and captain.*
Fred Rush.
Link Darrow.
Joe Westmore, *stroke.*

SECOND CREW.

Matt Roscoe, *bow and captain.*
Frank Pemberton.
Walter Bannister.
Paul Shale, *stroke.*

THIRD CREW.

Teddy Dugan, *bow and captain.*
Kyle Fenton.
Ike Suttervane.
Bart Mason, *stroke.*

"I have made Joe the stroke in one race and Paul the stroke in another because they won the singles last week," explained the coach. "Much depends upon the stroke, and I look to you to win on that account. Bart, I know can also row well. You ought to be able to push the Brookside club hard in all three races."

"Well, I'll do all I can to win," declared Joe, and the others said the same thing. The most enthusiastic lad was Teddy Dugan.

"Just to think I'm bow an' captain!" declared the Irish boy. "Sure and it's great, ain't it now? Oh, we'll wipe them Brookside lads off the face av the earth, so we will!"

"Don't crow too soon, Teddy," answered Fred. "You must remember that they know how to row—no two ways about it—and they are in the best of trim, too."

"All we can do is to do our best," declared Bart. "If we are beaten we'll have to take our medicine, that's all. But I don't think they'll beat us," he added, hopefully.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BITTER DEFEAT

"WELL, we met the enemy and we are theirs," said Paul.

"That's right. This is the time the Lakeport Boat Club got more than it bargained for," groaned Walter.

"And to think that we were beaten in those two races by no more than a length," went on Paul, bitterly.

"How the Brookside fellows will crow," put in Bart. "Why, when they won that last race you could have heard them yelling for miles."

"I thought we'd win at least two races out of the three," said Matt. "But to lose the last two—oh, it fairly makes me sick to think about it!"

"I feel like kicking myself around the block," was Ike Suttervane's comment. "They just walked over us like so much pie!" And he gave one of the shells a kick with his foot, to show his displeasure.

"Never mind, don't break the shell even if we did lose," said Joe.

"Oh, I don't care what I break," added the country youth, recklessly.

It was all too true—the races had come off and Lakeport had lost the second and the third, and each by only a length! If it had been two or three lengths, or ten, it might not have been so bad. But to lose each by only one little miserable length, well, it was maddening, that's all.

"You mustn't take it so to heart, boys," said Rockley White, kindly. "After all, as it now stands, this club has won one series out of two. It will take the eight-oared race to decide who takes two of the series out of three and becomes the champion of the lake."

After the races the boys had expected to have a fine time at the boathouse, and some of the girls, led by Laura, had provided generous refreshments. But the boys were too much downcast to eat and to enjoy themselves, and the affair was exceedingly tame, and broke up in an hour after it started. Laura went home with her brothers and did all in her power to cheer them up.

"I know it is dreadful," said she. "But you mustn't brood over it. You all rowed very well—everybody said so—that is, all but—but——" And here Laura hesitated.

"All but who?" asked Harry.

"Si Voup and Ike Boardman. They seemed to be glad that you lost."

"Where were they?"

"At the old Cardell boathouse. When some of the girls and I went by in Mr. Mason's boat they turned up their noses at us, but I pretended not to notice."

"Oh, you can depend upon it that Si and Ike were delighted," said Joe, bitterly. "They've been hoping we'd lose right along."

Over Sunday the boys were gloomy enough, but by Monday their spirits revived, and in the afternoon they went into training for the all-important eight-oared shell race. Rockley White kept them at it from two o'clock until five, both in the big shell and in that for four oars. He brought to light a few faults and made the lads correct them.

"Now I want you to be careful as to what you eat and drink during this week," he said. "Doesn't anybody present indulge in cigarette smoking?"

There was a vigorous shaking of heads.

"Or in the use of intoxicating liquors?"

"We occasionally have wine at home, but I don't drink much of it," said Walter.

"Better leave it alone entirely, Walter. It will never do you any good and it may do you much harm," said the coach.

"All right—I'll cut it out," answered the young oarsman.

"Every morning I want all of you to take a brisk walk or a short run," went on Rockley White. "That will aid your lung power wonderfully, and I also want you to practice with the gymnasium outfit, so as to add to your muscular development. Had you had a little more muscle and a little more wind you might have won last Saturday."

On Wednesday morning Matt had to go on an errand to Sherwood, a small hamlet several miles south of Lakeport. As is usual among boys, he asked some of his chums to go with him, and Harry and Fred went along, the others having work to do around home.

The boys went on their bicycles, and after the errand was done, Harry suggested that they ride to Camdale, a town of fair size not many miles away. "We can get some ice-cream soda there," said he, "and as I've just got my week's allowance, I'll stand treat."

Ice-cream soda was something they all liked, and soon the three were on the road to Camdale. It was somewhat hilly, but the three bicyclists did not mind this. At the top of a rise, they dismounted and threw themselves under an apple tree to rest. Then they proceeded once more, reaching Camdale

about eleven o'clock. The soda was to be had at a local confectioner's and thither they made their way, and Harry treated as promised.

The three youths were about to mount their wheels once more when they heard a commotion down the street. Several men came running along, followed by some boys.

"I wonder what's up?" queried Harry. "Something is wrong down on the next block."

"There's a fire!" cried Matt. "Oh, say, let's go!" he added. "I haven't seen a real town fire in my life."

The others were willing enough to go to the fire—what boy wants to stay away?—and leaving their bicycles in care of the confectioner, they started off on a run.

"It's Paxton's fireworks factory!" shouted one man, and at that moment came an explosion, followed by the flight of several rockets and Roman candles across the roadway. Then came a number of small explosions, sounding very much like the discharge of a Gatling gun.

"Say, we don't want to get too close to that place," warned Fred. "There may be some big explosion that will send the buildings sky-high."

The fireworks factory stood on a corner and was a brick building two stories high. The man-

agement employed less than a dozen men, but upward of fifty boys and girls worked there, manufacturing rockets, Roman candles, flower pots, set pieces, and the like. It was dangerous work, but the pay was fairly good, and this tempted many. The authorities had been trying to make the business move out of Camdale, but so far had been unable to accomplish their purpose.

It was a thrilling sight to the youths from Lakeport, for they had never seen a fire of any magnitude. They ran to the side street, where several people were pointing to an upper window.

"Some boys and girls are up there!" was the sudden cry. "They can't get down because the stairway is on fire!"

"Oh, think of that!" exclaimed Harry, in horror. "Maybe they'll be burned up!"

"Perhaps there is a ladder somewhere," suggested Fred. He looked around. "There is one now!" And he pointed down the side street, where some painters had been painting a house. The three boys ran for the ladder, and several men aided them in carrying it to the burning building, which was now flaring up fiercely from a far corner, where the fire had started.

The boys and two men were just raising the long ladder when there came a terrific explosion which

hurled Matt and one man flat. In terror the man leaped up and ran away, followed by the second man. Fred and Harry dropped the ladder against the building and turned to pick up Matt, who appeared somewhat dazed from his unusual experience.

As Matt arose several boys and girls came down the ladder, and then a middle-aged woman, the forelady of that department of the factory, followed. The woman glanced around sharply.

"Where is Polly?" she asked. And then raising her voice she called loudly: "Polly Fram! Polly Fram! Where are you?"

There was no answer, and now a fire engine dashed on the scene, followed by a hook and ladder company, and many in the gathering crowd were driven back. Harry looked up the ladder and saw the frightened face of a girl at a window. Her eyes were filled with terror, and she seemed unable to save herself.

"Come down! Come down!" called out several, but the girl did not move. Harry remembered her face as one he had seen somewhere but could not just then place it. For a moment he stood still; then, before he fully realized what he was doing, he was mounting the ladder with the nimbleness of a born fireman.

As he gained the window the girl fainted and disappeared. He leaned over the window-sill and picked her up from the floor. The smoke was rolling that way and made him cough and brought the water to his eyes. But he managed to retain his hold of her, and in a few seconds more he had the girl on the ladder and made his way to the ground with his burden over his shoulder.

"He's got Polly Fram!" was the cry.

"'Is everybody out now?"

"Yes."

Then came a tooting from the engine and a stream of water was turned on the building. Presently another engine came along and then a third, and fighting the blaze was taken up in earnest. A few more dull explosions were heard, and then the roof of the building caved in. After that there was nothing to do but to play upon the ruins until the last spark of the conflagration was extinguished.

"Harry, that was a brave thing to do," said Fred, in the midst of the tumult.

"Oh, nonsense, anybody could have done it," was Harry's modest reply. "Let us get out of the crowd."

The girl had been turned over to her friends, and she speedily revived from her fright. Then Harry and the other lads learned that she was Polly Fram,

the sister of Billy Fram, the ne'er-do-well of Lakeport. As my old readers will remember, Billy Fram was the lad who had once been hired by Sidney Yates to take the baseball outfit belonging to our friends and throw it down the old cistern on the Darrow place. For this Sidney had paid the ignorant lad fifteen cents, but the plot had been discovered by a cripple boy named Charley Crown, and Billy Fram had been caught and given a stern lecture, while Sidney's folks had to pay for the damage done to the suits and other things.

"I thought I had seen her before," said Fred. "I remember now, she used to work in the bakery at Lakeport, but she and another girl got positions here. They came on account of the good wages."

"I'll wager you didn't know you were saving Billy Fram's sister," said Matt to Harry.

"I didn't—but I should have saved her even if I had known her," answered Harry. "She isn't responsible for what her brother does,—and I don't want to see anybody burned up."

"Wonder what Billy will say when he hears of it," mused Fred. "He is such a hard-hearted little rascal I'll bet he won't even thank you."

But was Billy Fram so hard-hearted? Let us wait and see.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE HUT IN THE WOODS

THE eight-oared shell race to come off on the following Saturday had gotten "on the nerves" of some of the boat club members, and on Thursday morning it was decided by several of the lads to take a complete day off.

"There is a fine breeze, so what is the matter with going to the extreme upper end of the lake and camping out until night?" said Paul. "I can get the *Sprite,* and we can take along a basket of provisions. It is certainly too breezy to do any rowing." And in the last remark Paul was supported by Rockley White.

An hour after breakfast the boys were off. The breeze was in their favor, and with both mainsail and jib set they made rapid progress up the lake. When they came to Pine Island they passed on the right and then continued to a spot known as Point Arrow, where a long, arrow-like formation of rocks extended into the water. They entered the cove back of the Point and dropped anchor close to

a sandy beach. Then all took off their shoes and stockings and waded ashore, taking their provisions with them, and likewise some fishing poles, and a shotgun which Fred had insisted upon bringing.

This spot was a wild one which none of the lads had hitherto explored. Somebody had once told them that the place was full of snakes, but Joel Runnell had said to Joe that this was not true, that while there were a few snakes they were for the most part small and harmless.

The boys selected a spot for their camp, close to some big trees standing at the foot of a cliff overlooking the lake, and here a fire was built and preparations were made for dinner. Then some of the boys went fishing, while others, including Fred and Joe, took it into their heads to climb the cliff and see what was beyond.

It was no easy matter to get up the rocky wall, and the boys had to make several detours. Once they got stuck in a patch of thorn bushes and Fred set up a yell of pain.

"Somebody help me! I'm stuck in about a hundred places!"

"I've got all I can do to help myself," answered Joe, and the rest of the party said practically the same thing. In the end they had to cut their way

out of the thorn bushes with their jackknives, and after that they gave everything that looked thorny a wide berth.

Arriving at the top of the cliff they obtained a good view of the lake and also of part of the country behind them. But, in the rear, and to one side, was a dense growth of hemlocks and what was beyond they did not know.

"Let us take a short tramp in that direction," suggested Joe. "We have plenty of time, and the additional walk will give us that much more appetite for dinner."

"I think I've got appetite enough as it is," said Bart, who was along. "But I'll go if you want to."

The hemlocks looked very dense from a distance, but drawing closer the lads made out a rude path, which seemed to come from some point to the east of the cliff. This path led among the trees, but where to they had no means of ascertaining.

"Let us follow it up and see where it leads to," suggested Bart. "Maybe it runs to some lumber camp, or some charcoal burner's place."

"We don't want to get too far off," answered Fred. "Remember, we have got to walk all the way back,—and getting down the cliff isn't going to be easy."

The path was not well defined, and more than

once they were afraid they had missed it. They had gone on several rods when they came to a spring and on a bush near by hung an empty tin can.

"Somebody has been here," declared Joe, and he pointed to some wet footprints on the stones.

"There must be some kind of a camp around here," added Fred. "But what a wilderness to live in!" And he glanced at the tall and somber hemlocks and the many rough rocks.

The boys were just turning a point in the path when Joe, who was in advance, noticed a flutter ahead of him. It was a woman's skirt he had seen, and now, in the distance, he made out a woman carrying a bucket of water.

"She must live around here," said he. "She must have been down to the spring just before we got there."

"Let us follow her up and see where she lives," suggested Bart. "It can't be very far, or she wouldn't be carrying the water. That bucket must be pretty heavy."

The woman had disappeared, but by running a little they soon caught sight of her again, just as she was turning off the path and making her way between two series of rocks on the left. She did not look back, nor did they call to her. They ran up to the rocks, and looking around them discov-

ered a rude hut set some distance back, in a tiny clearing.

Coming to the hut the woman set down the bucket of water and entered the structure. A campfire was burning near the doorway, and over it hung an iron pot and a kettle.

"She must be a sort of gypsy," was Bart's comment. "I wonder if she is all alone."

"We can go forward and see," answered Fred.

"She may not like it that we have followed her," said Joe. "Some of these gypsies or hermits are very cranky. Don't you remember reading about that hermit over to Lackey Lake? He shot at some boys once, just because they were picking up walnuts. I shouldn't want to run the risk of getting shot."

"Oh, I don't think she's that kind, Joe," answered Bart. "I am not afraid to go and talk to her. If she doesn't want us around she can say so, and we can go away."

The woman had come out of the hut and was standing by the fire. She was well along in years, and her hair was gray and matted, and her dress old and torn. She was far from cleanly, and her wrinkled face was anything but pleasant.

"How do you do?" called out Joe, as the boys advanced towards the fire.

The woman gave one look at them, and then let out a cry of astonishment and alarm. Then she put up both her hands.

"Go away! Go away!" she cried.

"What's the matter?" asked Bart. "We are not going to hurt you."

"Go away!" repeated the woman, and advanced towards them. "I want nobody here. Go away!" And she stationed herself directly in the path of the boys.

"What place is this?" questioned Fred, just for the want of something to say.

"This is my home. Go away."

"May I ask your name?" questioned Joe.

"Mary Ann Dally. Now go away. I don't like boys around here." And the woman motioned them back.

"I see you have a bucket of water there," said Bart. "Can I get a drink?"

"You can get a drink down at the spring. Now go away and don't be after bothering me any more."

"May I ask, do you live all alone here?" questioned Joe. He saw that the woman was not crazy, but that she appeared to be very much alarmed.

"What business is that of yours? I want you to go away. If you don't go away, I'll sic the dog on you."

"Maybe we had better be going," whispered Fred. The stout youth had once had an encounter with a savage dog and did not wish to repeat the experience.

"We wish you no harm, ma'am," said Joe. "We were just out in the woods roaming around, and came to this spot by accident. If you—well, I declare!"

Joe broke off short and stared at the hut in amazement. At a window had appeared a small, white face, gazing at him pleadingly. The woman glanced around quickly and the face disappeared.

"What is it, Joe?" queried Bart.

"I saw somebody in the hut. I think it was Violet Corsen!" burst out Joe.

"You go away, I tell you!" shrieked the woman. "Go away or I'll sic the dog on you sure! I don't want you around."

"Violet Corsen?" cried Fred and Bart in a breath.

"There is nobody in my house," went on the woman. "Here, Mike! Mike!" she called, and from behind the hut came the rattle of a heavy chain. "Do you hear that? If I let Mike loose he'll chew all of you up in no time."

"If you let Mike loose I'll shoot him," answered

Joe, and tapped his hip pocket as if he had a pistol. "Don't you dare to move towards his kennel."

The woman turned, but Joe caught her by the arm and so did Bart. She uttered a scream of fright and tried to shove them away. In the meantime Fred ran towards the hut.

"Violet! Violet Corsen! are you there?" he called loudly.

"Yes! yes!" was the faint answer. "Who is it?"

"Fred Rush. And Joe Westmore and Bart Mason are with me."

"Oh, save me, Fred, save me! Take me home, won't you, please?"

"Yes," answered the stout youth, and with a bound he was in the low and dirty hut. It was rather dark inside and for several seconds he could see but little. Then he beheld poor Violet tied fast to several rings in the wall. The little girl was thin and pale, and her face showed plainly how she had suffered.

"Why didn't you call to us?" asked Fred, as he drew out his pocketknife and proceeded to cut Violet's bonds.

"I—I didn't dare," faltered the girl. "Mrs. Dally said she would beat me dreadfully if I made a sound."

"She shan't touch you, Violet." And now Fred cut the last cord and caught the little girl in his arms. "It's an outrage, to tie you up in this fashion. I rather think we'll have to hand Mrs. Dally over to the police."

"Oh, take me home first!" wailed Violet. "I want to go back to papa and mamma!"

"We'll take you home, never fear," answered Fred, tenderly.

CHAPTER XXX

THE RESCUE OF VIOLET

WHILE Fred was releasing Violet, Joe and Bart were holding Mrs. Dally. For a few minutes the woman struggled to get away, then of a sudden she sank down on her knees and covered her face with her hands.

"It wasn't me as did it!" she wailed. "I didn't take the girl away from home! You can't hold me for it!"

"So you admit you have Violet Corsen here, eh?" said Joe.

"I don't know who she is. But I didn't bring her here," was the broken answer. "Oh, I knew there would be trouble, I told Jake so."

"Jake who?" demanded Bart.

"Never you mind, boy. But I didn't steal the girl, remember that."

"If you didn't steal her, who did?" asked Joe. "Don't you know this is a serious business?" he continued. "When we hand you over to the police——"

"No! no! no!" shrieked Mary Ann Dally. "I won't go—I'll die first." And she began to rock back and forth and cry.

By this time Fred had released Violet and he brought the little girl into the open air. Violet was so stiff from being tied up she could scarcely walk, and she held tight hold of the stout youth's hand, for fear of being carried away again.

"Oh, Violet, I'm so glad we've found you!" cried Joe.

"And such blind luck as it was, too," added Bart. "We are camping below here, and came out for a walk."

"You won't let them carry me off again, will you?" asked the girl.

"No, indeed, we'll take you straight home," answered Joe.

"And you shall go along with us," said Bart, to the woman.

"No, no, I'll not go a step!" wailed Mary Ann Dally. "I didn't do it, did I, my dear?" and she turned pleadingly to Violet. "I did the best I could by you, didn't I?"

"No, you did not," answered Violet. "You did not give me half enough to eat, and you helped to tie me up——"

"The men made me do it,—you know they did."

"Who were the men?" asked Joe. "You had better tell us."

"The men were named Jake Sutter and Sandy Sanders," said Violet.

"Was one tall and the other short and stout?" queried Bart.

"Yes."

"They were the men who carried you off?"

"Yes, and they took me up the lake first, and then to Pine Island, and then brought me here,—after you followed the motor boat up the creek."

"Where are the men now?" asked Fred.

"I don't know. They talked about going to the city—to see somebody on business."

"Do you know when they were coming back?"

"Some time to-day. I think they said about three or four o'clock," answered Violet.

"Three or four o'clock," repeated Joe. He consulted his watch. "It is now half-past twelve."

"Joe, we ought to try to capture the rascals," said Bart.

"Just what I was thinking. The question is, Can we do it?"

"We can if the others will help us," answered Fred. "We can lay for the two men with our fire-arms and with clubs."

The matter was talked over for several minutes,

and it was finally decided to do all that was possible to capture the two men when they returned to the vicinity of the hut.

"But we must get Violet home as soon as possible, and turn this woman over to the authorities," said Joe.

Mrs. Dally protested and burst into a flood of tears, saying again she was not responsible. But the boys were stern, and made her get her hat and a bundle of her belongings, and come with them. Joe and Bart kept at her side, so that she might not escape, while Fred helped Violet, carrying the little girl where the path was too rough for her. Violet was still badly frightened and begged to be taken home at once.

It was no easy matter to get down to the foot of the cliff, and the boys had to assist both the girl and the woman from rock to rock. Mrs. Dally continued to protest, and said the men had frightened her into taking care of Violet, and that she had nothing whatever against the little miss. At last she declared she would tell all she knew, providing they did not have her locked up.

"You can do your talking to Mr. Corsen," said Joe. "But you have got to come along, and that is all there is to it."

As soon as they came in sight of the others, the

THE BOYS HAD TO ASSIST BOTH THE GIRL AND THE WOMAN FROM ROCK TO ROCK. — *Page 280.*

three boys set up a shout. Those at the camp were eating dinner and they leaped up in amazement at the sight of Violet. They asked a dozen questions at once, and Joe, Fred, and Bart had to go into all the details of what had occurred.

"It's the best news yet!" declared Harry. "Yes, we must take Violet home without delay, and we must capture those two rascals if it can possibly be done."

The matter was talked over, and it was decided that Paul should take the *Sprite* to Lakeport without delay, and inform the police of what was taking place. Frank and Walter were to go with him, to stand guard over Mrs. Dally, and of course Violet was to be of the party, too. The little girl was treated to the best the stock of provisions afforded. Then the sloop went on her way, the others watching her until a point of Pine Island hid her from view.

"Won't the Corsens be glad to see Violet!" said Matt. "I wish I could be there to see the meeting."

"We've got work to do," answered Link. "Those two bad men must be brought to justice."

As quickly as possible all the evidences of the camp were gotten out of sight, and then the crowd of boys climbed the cliff and made their way in the direction of the lonely hut in the woods. They

had with them Fred's shotgun and also a small pistol Matt had purchased for celebrating on the Fourth of July. In addition to these weapons each lad provided himself with a stout club, and Joe and Bart also carried ropes, gotten from the store aboard the *Sprite*.

"We want to take those fellows unawares if we can," said Joe. "If we don't they may put up the stiffest kind of a fight."

"I know what to do, so I do," suggested Teddy Dugan. "Hit 'em in the heads with our clubs first, an' when they come to their senses, talk to 'em."

"It may come to that," answered Link, with a short laugh. "But I'd prefer to capture them without a fight, if it can be done."

Arriving at the hut, the place was found just as it had been left an hour before. The boys walked around and inspected the locality, and then decided that their force should be divided, one-half concealing themselves behind the trees and the others hiding in the hut. If those outside discovered anything of the men one of them was to whistle like a bird, as a signal.

It must be confessed that some of the boys were very nervous and could hardly control themselves. Those outside lay flat on the ground with bushes

and leaves over them. Those in the hut hid behind the table and on either side of the open doorway. Link found an old shawl and a sunbonnet and put those on, to partly impersonate Mrs. Dally. This caused Matt to laugh, but Bart immediately silenced the fun-loving boy.

"This is a serious business," said the big youth. "We can do our laughing afterwards—after we have captured Mr. Jake Sutter and Mr. Sandy Sanders."

It was nearly four o'clock when the two men were discovered, coming along the path from the spring. They advanced with caution until within a hundred feet of the hut. Then they halted and gazed around earnestly. All of the boys kept out of sight, and finally the tall man walked slowly to the hut and poked his head in the doorway.

"Mary!" he called loudly, and just then Bart and Link pounced upon him and bore him to the ground. Then Matt came on top, while another boy sat on his legs.

"Hi! Let up there!" gasped the man, for most of the wind had been knocked out of him.

"You keep still," ordered Bart. "If you don't, we'll crack you over the head."

"Wha—what does this mean?" The man tried to turn over, but Bart caught him by the back of

the neck and bumped his nose on the ground. "Ouch! Stop that!"

"Will you keep still?" demanded Matt.

"I want to know——"

"We'll tell you later on. You keep still now," said Bart, and brought forth one of the ropes. "Tie his hands behind his back, boys, and tie 'em tight, too," he added, grimly.

"I won't stand for this!" roared the tall man, and began to struggle. But a crack from a stick knocked him half senseless, and then the boys bound him hand and foot.

Meantime the man outside had taken alarm and started to run away. But Fred confronted him with the shotgun, and Joe and Harry and the others closed in from all sides, and the man did not know what to do.

"Don't—don't shoot!" he cried, in alarm. "Don't shoot!" And he threw up both hands.

"Do you surrender?" demanded Joe.

"Surrender? I—I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do. Boys, bind him," went on Joe. "Fred, you keep him covered with the shotgun."

The man wanted to protest, but the sight of the shotgun cowed him and he allowed the boys to bind his hands behind him. He asked a number of ques-

tions, none of which they answered. Finally he commenced to break down.

"It wasn't my work," he whined. "Jake Sutter did it, and he made me help him."

"You can explain all that to the authorities," answered Fred.

"Where is Mrs. Dally?"

"You'll learn that later."

"Did you find the little gi——" The man stopped himself and coughed.

"Yes, we found the little girl, and she is on her way home," answered Joe.

In a minute more those in the hut came out, dragging the other man between them. The two rascals begged to be let go, and offered all the money they had—sixty dollars—to be set free. Of course the boys would not listen, and in the end they made the two rascals march down to the lake shore.

The shades of night were falling when they heard the put-put-put of a motor boat, and in a few minutes a craft from Lakeport came into view, carrying Paul, Mr. Corsen, and two officers of the law. The rich gentleman leaped out with great joy showing itself plainly on his face.

"You boys have done me a service I shall never forget," he said, earnestly. "Mrs. Corsen and myself were wild with joy when Violet came back.

And so you have captured the rascals who abducted her? Good!" And then he pressed the hand of each boat club member with great warmth.

Fortunately the motor boat was of good size and capable of holding the entire party. The two rascals were hustled on board and the others followed, and the boat headed for Lakeport. When the town was reached a crowd was at hand and there was strong talk of lynching Sutter and Sanders, and they were glad enough to be placed in the town lockup and under a strong guard. Once in prison Sanders broke down completely.

"It was all Sutter's fault," he said. "He was hired to do it by a man in the city named Asa Cranshaw."

"It is as plain as day," said Munroe Corsen. "Asa Cranshaw is, as you will remember, the man who wanted to buy out my interest in the oilcloth company. He wanted to get that twenty thousand dollars from me and then pay it back for my share of the holdings. Now, Mr. Cranshaw, we'll see what the law will say to such proceedings," he added, with vigor.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GREAT RACE—CONCLUSION

EARLY on Saturday morning there was a ring at the door of the Westmore home, and Laura answered the summons and found herself confronted by Billy Fram.

"Is Harry in?" asked the boy, with more bashfulness than was his usual style. "If he is, I'd like to talk to him a minute."

Harry was eating breakfast and Laura called him. She noticed Billy Fram was nervous and so left the two boys alone.

"Say," began the street boy, "I have been working over to Tucker's cider mill, and I didn't hear about what you done for Polly till last night. Say, it was great, Harry!"

"Oh, I didn't do much," was Harry's reply.

"Yes, you did—them gals told me all about it. Say, you're all right, an' I ain't going to forgit it, see? I thought youse was down on me and me family, because I—well, you remember about dem baseball suits——" Billy Fram hung his head.

"I'm awful sorry I did dat now, honest I am, an' I wouldn't do it ag'in fer a t'ousand dollars."

"I am glad to hear that, Billy. It was a mean trick."

"So it was. But, say, it ain't no meaner nor the tricks Si Voup an' Ike Boardman is playin' on you an' your brother Joe," went on the ne'er-do-well, lowering his voice slightly. "I came to tell you about 'em."

"What tricks, Billy?" and now Harry was all attention.

"Is Joe home?"

"Yes. Shall I call him?"

"Yes,—I want to tell him something, too."

Joe was called and the three boys went into the parlor. Billy Fram was ill at ease, but he had evidently come to clear his mind of something, and presently he plunged in.

"It's dis way," he began. "I wasn't going to say nothin' at first, but now I'm going to squeal, I am. I don't like Si Voup an' Ike Boardman anyway—they think I'm dirt under their feet, see? Harry did a lot fer me sister Polly, an' that's wot counts. Do you remember about the barn was burnt —old Jed Shaddock's place?"

"Of course," said Joe. "What do you know about that?"

"I know Ike Boardman done it, that's wot I know. He didn't do it a-purpose. He was fixin' something fer his automobile, an' he was smoking at the same time. The hay caught fire just as he walked away. I think he saw the blaze, but I ain't sure."

"Where were you?" asked Harry.

"In the loft. I had been snoozin' there. I crawled out the back way when Joe see the fire, an' I ran off, because I was afraid old Shaddock would blame me. An' that ain't all," went on the street boy. "Do you remember that boat race, when Harry was hit in the head? Well, I saw Si Voup do that. He had a slingshot, and he aimed it right at the boat and let fly, an' when he did that I see Harry drop. Nick Peterson saw that, too, and Si give him a dollar not to tell."

Having thus unburdened himself, Billy Fram went into many details, to which Mr. Westmore as well as the boys listened. Then all went up and located the youth named Nick Peterson, and this lad, after some cross-examination, admitted that what Billy Fram had told about the slingshot was correct, and he said that Billy had also told him about the barn-burning incident.

"I think I'll have those two boys taken care of," said Mr. Westmore, and went off to see his lawyer.

Then a hunt was made for Si and Ike, but it was learned that those two unworthies were off on a vacation on the Great Lakes, and would not be back for several weeks. A sharp letter was addressed to Mr. Voup and another to Mr. Boardman; and there the matter, for the time being, rested.

The day was a perfect one and Lakeport was in holiday attire, not only because of the great boat race to come off that afternoon, but also because of the safe return of Violet Corsen. There had been a grand time at the rich man's mansion, and Violet was nearly hugged to death by all who knew her. The two men and the woman implicated in the abduction had been locked up, and in the city, Asa Cranshaw was also under arrest. The boys had declined the reward for Violet's return.

Down at the boathouse a great crowd was assembled, all wishing the boys the best of luck in the coming race. The house was gaily decorated with flags from end to end, many provided by Mr. Corsen, and the rich gentleman had also provided a fine brass band which discoursed sweet music from a balcony. On the water numerous boats were to be seen, all crowded with folks anxious to witness the race for the championship of the lake.

Rockley White had "tried out" all the oarsmen

as best he could, and for the race announced the following crew and coxswain:

Bart Mason, *bow.*
Harry Westmore.
Link Darrow.
Fred Rush.
Matt Roscoe.
Teddy Dugan.
Walter Bannister.
Paul Shale, *stroke.*
Joe Westmore, *coxswain.*
Substitutes: Frank Pemberton and Ike Suttervane.

"The Brookside boys are out for blood to-day, so I've been told," said Matt, as he stripped and donned his rowing outfit. "They are trained to the top pitch."

"Well, so are we trained," answered Harry. "I am sure we have done all in our power to get into condition. If they win it will only be because they are better oarsmen, that's all."

"We must win!" cried Joe. "We've simply got to do it."

"That's the talk!" returned several, and a cheer went up for the Lakeport Boat Club.

The race was scheduled for three o'clock, and promptly on time the two eights took their positions at the starting point. All the conditions of the contest had already been explained to them. It was to be a three-mile race, a mile and a half up the lake and a mile and a half down.

Bang! went the cannon provided for the occasion, and both crews caught the water at the same time and started off side by side in a manner not to be excelled. There was a tremendous cheering and a tooting of whistles and horns, but then all became silent as the spectators watched the young oarsmen doing their best to win the championship of Pine Lake.

For fully half a mile the two shells kept side by side, and then they began to "saw," one craft going a foot or two ahead and then the other. Each crew was pulling a long, quick stroke, yet saving a good amount of its strength for the home stretch.

"They are certainly well matched," said Mr. Shale to Rockley White.

"You are right," answered the coach. "And those Brookside lads are excellently trained. It is the staying power that is going to tell in this race."

On and on shot the two shells until the turning stake was plainly to be seen. Then as if by magic the Brookside eight shot ahead a full length and

took the stake first, thus sending the Lakeport shell a length and a half to the rear. This set the Brookside supporters to cheering wildly.

"Hurrah for Brookside! That's the way to do it!"

"Now show 'em the way home, Dixon!"

"Pull, Lakeport, pull! You can win yet!" came from somebody in a naptha launch. It was Munroe Corsen, and he was as intensely interested as anybody.

As soon as the stake was passed, Joe called to Paul and the stroke was increased. Seeing this, the Brookside crew also increased their stroke, and the two shells retained their relative positions, a length and a half apart for the next quarter-mile. Then Brookside went another "notch" in her pulling and gradually increased the lead to two and a half lengths. At this her supporters shouted themselves hoarse.

There now remained less than a mile to be covered and Joe realized that the supreme struggle of the great race was at hand.

"Keep cool," he shouted. "Don't miss a stroke, whatever you do. Now then, Paul, shake her up!"

And Paul did "shake her up," in a style that was wonderful. He called out all his reserve strength, paying it away with but one thought in view—to

make it last until the finishing line was reached, and not a stroke further. Those with him responded nobly, and with each stroke the frail shell seemed fairly to shoot upward and onward over the sparkling waters of Pine Lake. Slowly they crawled up to the Brookside craft. The other fellows were also rowing like demons, but their gasps for breath told that the pace was too much for them, and that they were close to being "all in."

"See the Lakeports crawling up!"

"They are bow and bow now!"

"Brookside is still holding its own!"

"No, it isn't—it is falling behind!"

"Lakeport is ahead half a length!"

So the cries ran on, but nobody in the shells heard them. The young rowers were all but exhausted, and Harry felt his heart thumping in his breast like a steam engine. He wanted to look at the other boat but did not dare, for fear of missing his stroke.

And now came that final, supreme struggle, fully realized only by those who have taken part in such a contest as this. In desperation the Brookside crew was endeavoring to increase its stroke. But numbers four and five could not keep up the pace, and they broke, when yet the finish line was several rods off. Ahead shot the Lakeport boat, and now Paul and those with him used up every ounce of muscle

left to them. With a magnificent dash they passed over the line—the winners by two full lengths.

"Hurrah, Lakeport wins the race!"

"That's right, and that makes the Lakeport Boat Club the champion club of Pine Lake!"

And then what a cheering and yelling and tooting of horns and whistles followed, while many waved their flags and banners! The band struck up a lively air, and in the midst of this the winning crew came ashore, to be fairly hugged by their admirers. Of course the Brookside crew was keenly disappointed, but they had been beaten fairly, so they could not complain.

In secret, Munroe Corsen had provided a grand feast for all who wished to participate, and the boathouse was thrown open to everybody in Lakeport. It was certainly a day never to be forgotten, and the festivities were kept up almost until Sunday morning.

"You did grandly," said Rockley White. "I am proud of you and I feel well repaid for all my trouble."

"We owe our victory to you," said Joe, and the others said the same. Later on, the boat club presented the coach with a fine gold scarfpin, and this pleased Mr. White very much.

During the following week Munroe Corsen made

complaints against Asa Cranshaw and those who were in league with him. As a consequence all of the evil-doers were severely punished according to law, which was what they deserved. As soon as Violet came back, Mrs. Corsen took a turn for the better, and was speedily restored to her usual good health.

Si Voup and Ike Boardman did not return to Lakeport for some time, and meanwhile their folks did what they could to smooth matters over with Jed Shaddock and with Mr. Westmore. The old farmer was paid for the loss of his barn, and Mr. Westmore said he would drop his case against Si and Ike if they would promise to leave his family alone in the future.

"I can tell you, this has been a great summer," said Fred, one day. "I don't think we'll ever see such stirring times again." But in this latter surmise the stout youth was mistaken, as we shall see in the next volume of this series, to be entitled "The Football Boys of Lakeport; or, More Goals Than One." The football season was now close at hand, and several were already talking about organizing an eleven to play matches with several teams of the surrounding country.

"Well, boating is great sport," said Paul, one day, when he and the others were out on the *Sprite*.

"Especially when you win a race!" answered Harry.

"Our season was quite successful, after all," said Joe. "We didn't win every race, but we won the championship of the lake——"

"And that's enough," finished Fred; and the others agreed with him.

THE END

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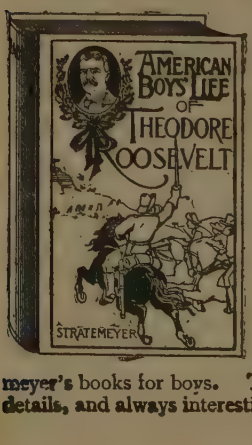

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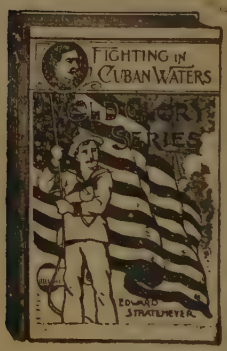

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